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Thesis

A NEW ENGLAND FROST

A Study of the Life and Letters of
Robert Frost, Poet and Gentleman

Submitted by

Elizabeth Williams Wade

(B.S. in Ed., Boston University, 1930)

In partial fulfillment of requirements for
the degree of Master of Education

1938

Readers:

Everett L. Getchell, Professor of English

Edward J. Eaton, Professor of Education

L. Harold DeWolf, Assistant Professor of Philosophy
and Psychology

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Gift of E. W. Wade
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17283

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AN APPENDIX

The author wishes to extend his
sincere thanks to Dr. Herbert J.
Gibbs, and also for his
kindness in allowing to be
through very much of his
time, and in his own words

1911

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AN
INTRODUCTION
TO

A N E W E N G L A N D F R O S T

A Study of the Life and Letters of
Robert Frost, Poet and Gentleman

AN
INTRODUCTION
TO

A NEW EDITION

A Study of the Life and Letters of
Robert Frost, Poet and Gentleman



I N T R O D U C T I O N

Far away and long ago, when I was very young-eight, to be exact-and a particularly prickly thorn in the flesh of my sixth-grade teacher, I enjoyed, each afternoon, some never-to-be-forgotten experiences in the Realm of Literature. To us was given the daily privilege of association with a Group of the Great, grave dignified gentlemen called "The New England Poets". Well do I remember how, in Memory Gem period, I "built thee more stately mansions, O my soul" with Oliver Wendell Holmes; found that "life is real, life is earnest" as I made "footprints on the sands of time" with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow; pondered over the question, "What is so rare as a day in June?" with James Russell Lowell one week, only to discover the answer by being "Snowbound" with John Greenleaf Whittier the next; "found the fresh rhodora in the woods" with the Sage of Concord, Ralph Waldo Emerson, as my guide, and learned from him

"that if eyes were made for seeing,

Then Beauty is its own excuse for being:" ;

and, as a grand finale, was prepared for my last days

by being shown how to approach the grave

"Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch

About him and lies down to pleasant dreams"

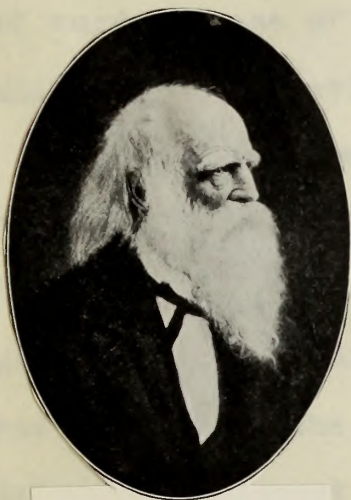
by no less a person than William Cullen Bryant.

All the while I walked in beauty created by these Gracious Gentlemen, I was unconsciously forming a rather exact concept of what the ideal New England poet should be like, particularly as to appearance. Torso and limbs he must have, of course, and, as he moved about in dignified manner, his nether extremities must be earth-bound, in accordance with the discovery of Sir Isaac Newton. Raised eternally above the clouds, however, must be his crowning extremity, that he might hold converse with fellow-deities.

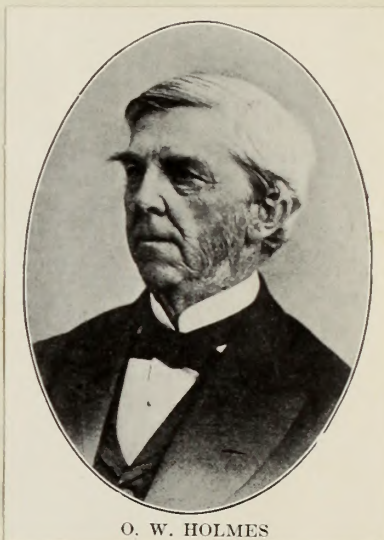
Within this Olympian head must be gray matter in such abundance that it could not only create lengthy and sonorous metric matter, exhorting mankind to the noblest of thoughts and deeds, but it could, at the same time, nourish the roots of hair so abundant that it put the seven Sutherland Sisters on their mettle. Yes, springing from this lofty head MUST be long, flowing gray locks, for the prints of all the New England poets which we sixth-graders pasted into our poetry note books showed heads of hair which filled us with awe and admiration.

To an even greater extent were we impressed by the beards of these prophets, for no New England writer of repute was without his whiskers. Any collection of pictures of eminent authors of that day showed gentle-

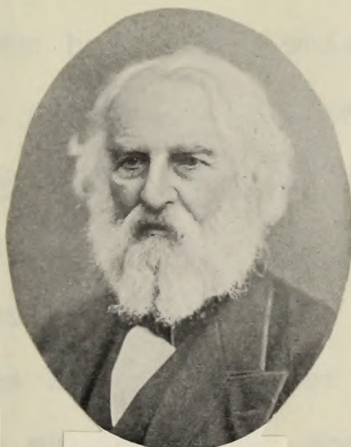
men with features so nearly concealed behind rich and luxurious crops of whiskers that we actually considered them a necessity, suspecting, no doubt, that the poetic Muse might be lurking in such dense shrubbery.



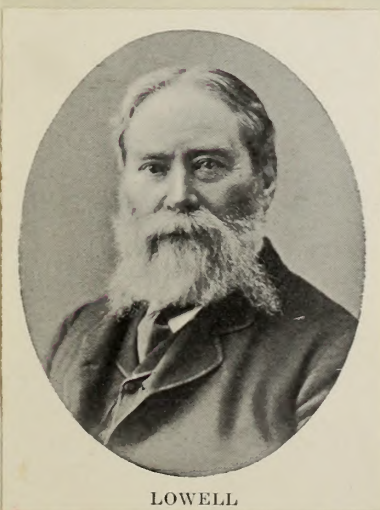
WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT



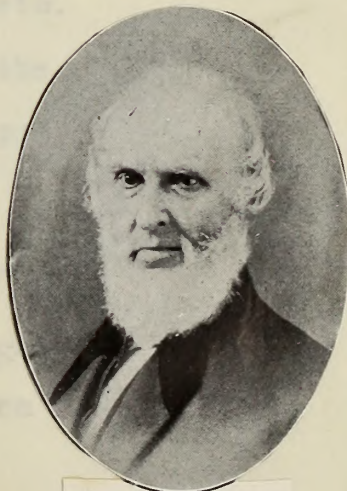
O. W. HOLMES



LONGFELLOW



LOWELL



JOHN G. WHITTIER

To sum up the attributes of this ideal New England poet: he must be hoary and dignified, hairy and superhuman. He must be given to verbosity and circumlocution in many of his creations, and in all of them "poetical" in his choice of words, those of the five-syllable variety preferred o'er all others and lavishly besprinkled 'mongst THEES and THOUs.

Thus was formed, in my childhood days, a mental picture of the typical New England poet. Thus was it lodged in the background of my mind, to remain for years after I was grown up, as childish pictures will. Then, suddenly, it was brought to the foreground, when I saw and heard and talked with a poet who had nary a whisker; who consorted with and wrote about fellow-humans; whose metrical matter was just conversation about simple things; who was, as Sidney Cox so aptly puts it, Robert Frost, Ordinary Man. Never an attribute of my typical poet did he have, and yet, to me, he was THE New England Poet of poets.

This, then, is my thesis:-to show the reader that ROBERT FROST IS THE NEW ENGLAND POET OF POETS by describing one New England Frost in relation to different environments and by offering for scrutiny some of the nuggets of wisdom this particular Frost has brought out of the ground of New England to add to the Golden Treasury of Universal Literature.

C H A P T E R O N E

EARLY FROST



WEATHER FORECAST

For San Francisco and vicinity, March 26, 1875

Sudden drop in temperature.

Look out for EARLY FROST!

C H A P T E R O N E

EARLY FROST

"Robert Frost, Ordinary Man!" This ordinary man who writes such extraordinary poetry about New England was born clear across the continent in a state which boasts continually of its perfect climate and makes no mention of its fogs and frosts. Here is one Frost, however, of which California may well be proud! Just five days after the advent of Spring in 1875, San Francisco was visited by this nip of Frost, with origins in New England and Scotland. The proud father was William Prescott Frost, Jr. of the Bulletin-Democratic newspaper, product of seven generations of New England Frosts. After graduating from Harvard second highest in his class, William accepted the advice of Horace Greeley to "Go West, young man, go West", pausing on the way to teach school at Bucknell Academy in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. Here he fell in love with a fellow-teacher, Isabelle Moodie, who had left her native Scotland, when her father was lost at sea, to live with an uncle in Ohio, but whom Fate had sent to Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, that she might meet William Prescott Frost, Jr. and become the mother of the greatest poet of our time.

This Scotch mother must have brought from the land of Bobby Burns some of that great poet's spirit of brotherhood for the common man and love of the common, everyday things of life; some of his ability to search with genuine insight into the reason and nature of commonplace little incidents; some of his genius in expressing the results of these searchings in gems of simple, yet philosophic verse. These she transmitted to her son along with a share of her own talent in writing.

The father's contribution, besides the long line of New England ancestors already mentioned, was further talent in writing, yes; but far more important were the opportunities he gave to his only son to share in his rich and robust experiences in living. Though the White Plague was ever trying to catch up with the hyper-active Mr. Frost, it was not until Robert was ten that the dread disease succeeded in claiming its victim. During those ten years in which William Frost lived life to the full, young Robert was drawn into a great many adventures incredible for a child of his years.

It had been because his father was a solid sympathizer with the South that the first and only boy had been christened Robert Lee Frost instead of William Prescott Frost, 3rd, as you might expect. It was because Fa-

ther Frost dabbled and plunged in stocks that Mother Frost, Robert, and his sister sometimes had plenty and again were in dire need. It was because William was an ardent Democrat and a fervid celebrator that his son not only rode in floats in daylight parades and marched in torchlight processions, but, small as he was, even campaigned for his father when William ran for the office of tax-collector for San Francisco.

The book Robert Frost by Gorham B. Munson gives us a surprising picture of the way in which the child helped his father to solicit votes.

*"...Political ambitions yielded only small fruits. Mr. Frost did go as a delegate to one Democratic National Convention, and he was city campaign manager in 1884, when Cleveland was elected President. He was defeated, however, when he ran for election as tax collector of San Francisco. In that campaign the boy Robert was his constant companion. His job was to visit the saloons with his father's campaign cards and to impale these on the ceiling by flinging upwards a card with a tack through it and a silver dollar beneath the tack which worked as a sort of flying mallet-and this, one fancies, remains to this day the most active participation in politics of Robert Frost."

Active participation it surely was! Even at the age of ten, then, Robert was aiming high and attaining his mark; was depending on the skill in his fingertips for success; all in the commonest of surroundings, where human nature could be perceived in its most primitive state, if bar-room ballads of that era are true-and I fear they are!

Parading and campaigning were only "odd jobs", however, and

there was still time for boyish pranks, as is shown in a delightful poem in Further Range, Frost's latest book of verse.

The title, "At Woodward's Gardens", gives the San Francisco setting; the author himself, the characters:-

"A boy, presuming on his intellect,
Once showed two little monkeys in a cage
A burning glass they could not understand
And never could be made to understand.
Words are no good; to say it was a lens
For gathering solar rays would not have helped.
But let him show them how the weapon worked."

Breathes there one soul who has not at some time during his childhood learned the use of some sort of "lens for gathering solar rays"; who has not demonstrated the way this "weapon" works by focusing it upon some pre-occupied companion? But who, except Frost, would be able to describe the incident in this way?

To continue:-

"He made the sun a pin-point on the nose
Of first one, then the other, till it brought
A look of puzzled dimness to their eyes
That blinking could not seem to blink away.
They stood arms laced together at the bars
And exchanged troubled glances over life."

A wonderful description of the worried expressions on little monkey faces when they huddle together in a fright, looking like a group of wizened old men!

All's well that ends well, and monkey serenity was restored when

"The boy...presumed too close and long...for
 There was a sudden flash of arm, a snatch,
 And the glass was the monkey's, not the boy's.
 Precipitately they retired back cage
 And instituted an investigation
 On their part, though without the needed insight.
 THEY BIT THE GLASS AND LISTENED FOR THE FLAVOR"

The last line I have capitalized because I think
 it should be made to stand out, so perfect a picture it is
 of monkey-business, crystallized into one line!

Then:-

"They broke the handle and the binding off it.
 Then none the wiser, frankly gave it up,
 And having hid it in their bedding straw
 Against the day of prisoners' ennui,
 Came dryly forward to the bars again
 To answer for themselves: Who said it mattered
 What monkeys did or didn't understand?
 They might not understand a burning-glass.
 They might not understand the sun itself.
 It's knowing what to do with things that counts."

And it is, isn't it? It takes a Robert Frost,
 however, to conclude with this sage comment a bit of de-
 scriptive writing about a simple little incident concern-
 ing a small boy, a burning-glass, the sun, and two monkeys,
 and to have this writing turn out to be a prize-winning
 poem, in spite of the preaching and the commonplace sub-
 ject matter. That is the magic that lies in the pen of
 Robert Frost-the ability to describe a common incident in
 an uncommon manner, and to draw from it sound philosophy,
 applicable in all places and at all times.

I heard Mr. Frost apply it himself to present

day conditions when he was speaking of an author who never spent a waking moment without the fear of Hell. This fear, he said, was far nobler than being all fussed up over depressions and wars as we are here in America at the present time. He intimated that our New Deal wasn't leaving enough to DO ITSELF; that the Powers-that-be in our government should sit tight and let the snarl of tendencies collide and cancel each other, and then come in with the right touch at the right moment.

"It's knowing what to do with things that counts. Like the monkeys in the poem, we'll never understand, but we'll never be licked, and," asked Mr. Frost, "does it matter?" No one in the audience listening to Mr. Frost's lecture essayed an answer to the question. Apparently no one knew-and probably the poet himself did not know, for he delights in asking questions, the answers to which he does not know.

To this same audience Mr. Frost told another little incident of his childhood which occurred when he was only six, and yet he not only recalled it vividly, but saw something in it which most of us would never see.

An immense Rocky Mountain eagle flew down from the heights and threatened for a moment to seize the boy, but deciding at a nearer view that he was a trifle too large

to feed to her children, flew away empty-taloned. Robert Frost said that he was carried away WITH the eagle, but not BY her, and warned those of us who were listening to use the same procedure with Imagination, when she swooped down upon us from the blue:-to be carried away WITH, but never BY, Imagination.

One more incident that stood out in the San Francisco years concerned a lost quarter or two bits, as it was called on the Pacific Coast. William Frost, at work in his study, discovered that he had no cigarettes and sent Robert on the run for some. Unfortunately the money slipped from the boy's hand and rolled into a crack in the board sidewalk where no one was able to retrieve it. As Robert did not dare to return home without cigarettes, he went to the store, told the clerks about losing the money, and begged for a free package. Receiving nothing but jeers and rebuffs, the terror-stricken lad went back to the house empty-handed to ask his mother what to do. Mrs. Frost was just as fearful as was Robert of the "frostbite" which would ensue, but she was a woman of deep faith, by religion a Swedenborgian, and she suggested that they pray together that on this occasion leniency be shown. Fortified by the prayer, Robert entered the study, told his father of the accident, and received merely a quick glance and a curt, "Never mind!"

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In such fashion did childhood fear of his brilliant father and confidence in his steadfast mother nurture in Robert Frost a point of view evident in both his life and his works:-that there is darkness over much of the world, but that the light of faith will shine through, if one will wait and watch and believe.

To return to the political situation in the Democratic circles of 1884 and to our candidate for the office of tax-collector for San Francisco; though William Frost wished to be elected the guardian of other people's money, he characteristically forgot to take care of his own. When he died of tuberculosis in 1885, his neglect to pay up his insurance policy left Mrs. Frost, Robert, and his sister with no alternative but to travel across the continent to Lawrence, Massachusetts, to live with dependable Grandfather and Grandmother Frost.

Robert hated to leave his "gang"; hated to abandon the little chicken farm he had started in the back yard of his California home; hated most of all to have as his destination a locality which Father William had pictured to his two children as so unattractive that he had fled its borders as soon as his schooling was over. Strange it is that Robert Frost, who is described by all as the very essence of New England, should come here, a native-born Cal-

ifornian, hating New England with every breath that he drew. Stranger, still, it would be to those of us who were born and bred in New England if it had not transpired that

"he who came to scoff
remained to pray";

to grow out of prejudiced childhood into appreciative manhood. Strangest of all is the fact that once he did appreciate and love the new environment, he should interpret it so vividly, so unforgettably, to the rest of the world that to all lovers of the best in poetry the names Robert Frost and New England are synonymous the wide world over.

C H A P T E R T W O

LOCAL FROST



High School in Lawrence, Massachusetts, as it looked when both Robert Frost and his wife were graduated with honor in June of 1892.

C H A P T E R T W O

LOCAL FROST

Robert Frost's grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. William Prescott Frost, Sr. of Lawrence, Massachusetts, seem to have had all the sturdy qualities of New England character which William Jr. lacked. When their son's widow and two small children arrived from California, weary and disheartened, these older Frosts immediately assumed responsibility for the bereft family and continued to do so for many years. The children were placed in public school in Lawrence, while the mother resumed her former profession of teaching.

Busy and perturbed though she was, Isabelle Moodie Frost found time to continue a practice which she had begun in California of reading aloud to her children from the best in literature; and to this day her son makes grateful acknowledgement to her for so doing. It is amusing to note that whenever she read Tom Brown's School Days, Robert would never let her finish it, for he could not bear to have it end. While listening to Bellamy's Looking Backward, he was greatly disturbed because the characters had to live by schedule and could not move without having a card punched. Even then there was "something in his bones that didn't like being tended to", and right up to the present time he has

never been "watched" while writing.

Until the Lawrence years Robert had been content to merely listen his way through good books, but now he began to read independently. He pored through the pages of Poe, Edward Rowland Sill, Bryant, and Longfellow-whom he calls one of the real American poets of yesterday-, and then on through Keats and Shelley and the rest of England's immortals. So great was his enjoyment of the songs of these poets that he memorized long passages for sheer joy in the music, and he can quote line after line with very little effort ~~even~~ now, almost a half century later.

It was during these Lawrence years that Robert Frost had the vision which seemed to him like the shining gate in Pilgrim's Progress, which he describes somewhat after this fashion:-

"Up to fifteen your life is chaos. Suddenly a light comes, a blaze for all you've known and read up to then. All the combustibles of the first fifteen years of life are touched off with such splendor that the light is thrown on the walls of the Universe. After you see this vision, any artistic creation which originates within you is a fresh access of longing for this thing you've seen, a rush of heart to the head."

It must have been just such a vision which prompted

him to write his first poem, "La Noche Triste", published in the Lawrence High School Bulletin for April, 1890, for he was fifteen years old when he composed the verse.

Two years later he was graduated from Lawrence High School with highest honors; rather with half the highest honors, for he had to share them with a girl who was completing the entire high school course in only two and one half years. Another shining light had appeared to him, again connected with a Pilgrim, but this Pilgrim was one of the band who came to our wild New England shore in 1620, namely Peregrine White, one of the two babies born aboard the Mayflower on the journey over. Peregrine's descendent, Elinor Miriam White, and Robert Lee Frost wrote their names together as co-authors of the valedictory to their classmates of Lawrence High School, class of 1892; and so natural a combination was White-Frost that they made the union permanent in December of 1895 by again writing their names together, this time as a salutatory to matrimony.

Though Elinor and Robert were the co-authors of the valedictory, the public delivery on the night of graduation was made by Robert alone, while Elinor remained in the background, self-effacing and modest. Thus has it been throughout the happy married life of the Frosts. The husband has

received the adulation of the public because of his marvellous ability to write, but he has been able to express himself in this inimitable fashion because in the background was this quiet, gracious helpmate, giving encouragement and cooperation every step of the way, even when the road was beset with obstacles. The two have always remained together in an ideal union, broken only by the recent death of Mrs. Frost in Florida, where she and her husband were vacationing to escape the rigors of our New England winter. Robert Frost must find this a lonely world, indeed, with half of his very soul gone on into the next world, but at least he has beautiful memories and faith which can endure loneliness. These lines from his poem "Bereft" seem to picture him as he is now, though they were written years ago.

* "Word I was in the house alone
 Somehow must have gotten abroad.
 Word I was in my life alone,
 Word I had no one left but God."

To return to the days when Elinor White and Robert Frost were graduated from Lawrence High School-as might be expected, both honor students went on to college. Elinor entered St. Lawrence University, a Universalist college at Canton, New York, while Robert, at his grandfather's behest, enrolled at Dartmouth. Strange to say, the boy did not like

Dartmouth, in spite of its lovely New Hampshire setting, and after a few months he left college and returned to Lawrence, where he found work as a bobbin boy in one of the large woolen mills for which the city is famous. Here he stayed for only a short time, and why he left I do not know, but I wonder if he has not given us the clue in the opening poem in Further Range entitled "A Lone Striker"!

"The swinging mill bell changed its rate
 To tolling like the count of fate,
 And though at that the tardy ran,
 One failed to make the closing gate.
 There was a law of God or man
 That on the one who came too late
 The gate for half an hour be locked,
 His time be lost, his pittance docked.
 He stood rebuked and unemployed.
 The straining mill began to shake.
 The mill, though many-many eyed,
 Had eyes inscrutably opaque;
 So that he couldn't look inside
 To see if some forlorn machine
 Was standing idle for his sake.
 (He couldn't hope its heart would break.)"

In this quotation we recognize Frost's ability to picture the usual in an unusual manner from his description of the long, long rows of mill windows, mounting up story after story, which we must look AT, as we travel through the city of Lawrence, but which we can never look THROUGH.

The mill, though many-many eyed,
 Had eyes inscrutable opaque.

His lighter humor is shown in the idea of the "forlorn machine", standing idle for his sake, but not broken-hearted

over the matter; his sardonic humor in the suggestion that it might be in obedience to a law of God that the gate was locked on late-comers. Mr. Frost knew, of course, that the Lawrences who owned the mills were connected with the Boston Lowells, the Lowells "who spoke only to God", and he may have fancied the penalty for tardiness being transmitted in turn from God to the Lowells, from the Lowells to the Lawrences, and from the Lawrences to the mill hands; then, with his tongue in his cheek, have set down his fancy:

There was a law of God or man
That on the one who came too late
The gate for half an hour be locked,
His time be lost, his pittance docked.

The end of this quotation shows another characteristic of Frost's found in many of his poems; found, indeed, in many natives of New England-namely laconicism, a long word with a short meaning. "His pittance docked" is an expression of only three words, and yet it conveys better than three hundred words the stinginess of the wealthy mill-owners and their contemptuous practice of docking an already inadequate wage.

The poem goes on to picture the tardy worker standing at the gate, not at all chagrined at being barred from his job, but thinking, instead, of a favorite haunt of his on a cliff, where, up amongst the tops of the trees, he

might enjoy

"Their upper branches round him wreathing,
Their breathing mingled with his breathing.

He knew a path that wanted walking
He knew a spring that wanted drinking;
A thought that wanted further thinking;
A love that wanted re-renewing.
Nor was this just a way of talking
To save him the expense of doing.
With him it boded action, deed.

He never would assume that he'd
Be any institution's need.
But he said then and still would say
If there should ever come a day
When industry seemed like to die
Because he left it in the lurch
Or even merely seemed to pine
For want of his approval, why
Come get him-they knew where to search."

To the high woods, then, went the worker, but apparently the wheels of industry never stopped turning for one instant to call him back, for he never returned to the mill. This is autobiographical of a restless, unsettled period in Frost's life, when he often used to walk from Lawrence to Boston to have something to do. In a recent lecture he told of walking from Lawrence to Boston and then back to Lawrence again, all in one day, showing that it was not laziness that kept him from a steady job, but rather uncertainty as to what the job was for which he was best fitted.

Gorham Munson gives this very fine picture of the "exploratory" phase of Frost's life:

* "Drifting these days were for him, and perhaps they are best symbolized by a brief tramping tour which he made down South.

"His mother was taking pupils in her little school in Lawrence, and Robert instructed there for a while in Latin. Previously he had a spell of making shoes. Finally he was the reporter-editor of the Lawrence Sentinel, a weekly paper. Reporting, however, was against his temperament. One had to be active to get the news, active and prying into the reticences of people. Robert Frost, respecting his own reticences, respected those of others, and the occupation was extremely distasteful. More to his liking was a column he inaugurated, one in which he could insert vignettes he had written; the picture of a ragged child coal-picker in a railroad yard; of a stray eagle who lit on top of the flagpole at the Post Office until some hours later it was shot down to Frost's indignation.

"Making a living----was a sort of hazy actuality about which eventually something would be done. As another preparatory step to meeting this problem, Robert again tried college, again backed up by his uncomprehending but sympathetic grandfather. This time it was Harvard in the year 1897."

It seems strange that any one of a poetic nature should prefer Cambridge, Massachusetts, steeped in tradition though it be, to lovely Hanover, New Hampshire, so picturesquely situated on the Connecticut River, with the green hills of Vermont just over the way. Such, however, was the case with this young poet, for where Dartmouth held him but two months, Harvard claimed him for two years.

Since Frost did prefer Harvard to Dartmouth, it is interesting to try to think of reasons for his preference. The fact that it was his father's alma mater would,

of course, draw him to Harvard. Once enrolled, he would be ashamed to leave a second college too quickly because it would not be fair to his grandfather. Again, at Dartmouth he had been single, but now he was a married man with a baby boy, Eliot, born in '96, so he should be studying seriously for some profession. Most significant reason of all, he really liked his work at Harvard, for his first unsuccessful venture into the field of college life had taught him to be chary in his choice of courses, and he was careful, at Harvard, to select only the best. He had the rare privilege of studying philosophy with Santayana, whose "golden speech" dazzled and delighted him, and he also plunged deeply into the Classics, which he thoroughly enjoyed, particularly Virgil. Those who know Virgil's Eclogues and Georgics well seem to think that Frost's style in writing is rather reminiscent of these pastorals, if it resemble any style at all. Frost says himself that he first "heard the voice" from a printed page in a Virgilian Eclogue.

In spite of the fact that Frost's marks in Greek and Latin were exceptionally high, two years of the Harvard curriculum seem to have been enough for him. Munson says,

*"College could not hold him to the end. There was a man in Windham, New Hampshire----named Charley Hall, whose speech had a racy commonness, and the stimulus of this man's

*G. B. Munson: Robert Frost pp. 34 & 35

talks was greater than the correct speech of college instructors. On the basis of this homely, shrewd, and living talk, could not poetry be written by a good listener? Frost deserted academic halls for his own peculiar university, a life close to the soil, among soil-tinged folk, listening to their turns of thought and feeling and phrase."

Down-a-down-Derry, then, went Robert Frost, to live on a farm situated on the turnpike that joins Salem and Derry, New Hampshire, and with him went Mrs. Frost, a new baby girl, Leslie, and the first-born, Eliot, who died very soon after the move was made. Once again Grandfather Frost supplied the necessary funds, disappointed as he was at his grandson's decision to leave college, and with \$1800 he bought the farm which was eventually to establish his grandson as an authority on New Hampshire farm life, though hardly in the way either he or Robert Frost intended.



C H A P T E R T H R E E

Of his back-to-the-farm movement Robert Frost has

written:

"When I left Massachusetts years ago

Between FROST IN NEW HAMPSHIRE I sought

New Hampshire, not Connecticut,

Rhode Island, New York, or Vermont was what

Where I was living then, New Hampshire offered

The nearest boundary to escape notice."



Old and New Pinkerton Academy, Derry, N. H.

Pinkerton Academy, Derry, New Hampshire,

where Robert Frost began his

inspired teaching of English.

C H A P T E R T H R E E

FROST IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

Of his back-to-the-farm movement Robert Frost has written:

* "When I left Massachusetts years ago
Between two days, the reason why I sought
New Hampshire, not Connecticut,
Rhode Island, New York, or Vermont was this:
Where I was living then, New Hampshire offered
The nearest boundary to escape across."

Few there are who would consider it escape to try to wrest a living from the worn-out soil of Derry instead of earning a degree from the fertile fields of learning at Harvard, but Robert Frost was one of the few. As we know, frosts and farmers do not mix, and there ensued six years of failure as far as material crops were concerned, with no **produce** left over from home consumption to take to market to sell. Frost's poetical crop was plentiful, however, for he garnered incidents and reactions to incidents and conversations about incidents from the every-day lives of the villagers about him as well as from his own life, and he wove them all into a pattern of verse so true to the original that it was almost photographic. An abundance of this crop he had to send to market, but alas! he could find no market that would take his literary produce! The magazines and journals of that day did not recognize as

* New Hampshire

CHAPTER THREE

THE FROST IN THE WINTER

Of his back-to-the-land movement Frost has

written:

"When I left Massachusetts years ago
between two dates, the reason why I sought
the Hampshire, not Connecticut,
Rhode Island, New York, or Vermont was this:
there I was living then, the Hampshire offered
the nearest opportunity to escape success."

Few there are who would consider it escape to try
to wrest a living from the worn-out soil of Garry instead
of earning a degree from the fertile fields of learning at
Harvard, and Robert Frost was one of the few. As we know,
Frost and Lathrop, his wife, and their young six years
of Lathrop as far as material things were concerned, with
no produce left over from home consumption to take to mar-
ket to sell. Frost's material crop was plentiful, however,
for he gathered incidents and reactions to incidents and
conversations about incidents from the every-day lives of
the villagers about him as well as from his own life, and
he was able to find a pattern of verse as true to the o-
riginal that it was almost photographic. An abundance of
this crop he had to send to market, but also he could
find no market that would take his literary produce! The
magazines and journals of that day did not recognize as

poetry Frost's conversational verse about ordinary subjects and refused to consider the originator a poet.

On the other hand none of Frost's neighbors regarded him as a farmer, and there were utterly scandalous tales of his cows being milked at ten at night in order that their owner might burn the midnight oil and sleep late the next morning. It is easy to forgive Farmer Frost his erratic milking schedule when one considers the prodigious amount of verse he composed during this period, including such favorites as "The Death of the Hired Man", "The Housekeeper", and "Black Cottage". It must also be borne in mind that there were now three new-comers in the household: a boy, Carol, born in 1902, and two girls, Irma and Marjorie, born in 1903 and 1905, all so near of an age that during the teething stage there must have been many midnight vigils at the bedsides of crying babes. Throughout the summer months there were certainly many sleepless nights for the father of the family, for he suffered greatly from hay fever every year. All in all Robert Frost experienced everything but material success as a New Hampshire farmer. Munson says,

*"The end of this venture came in 1905, when Frost drove up to the butcher's to make further purchases on credit. The fattish butcher came brusquely out on the porch of his store, cocked an appraising eye at Frost's horse, and inquired, none too delicately, if anyone had

a lien on it. Then Frost, with four children, a run-down farm, and a bundle of unpublished poems on his hands decided to apply for a position at Pinkerton." (the village academy)

As noted before, Frost had taught successfully at his mother's school in Lawrence, and that teacher-training experience together with his fine scholastic record gave him the courage to apply for the job which he needed so badly. There were other applicants, but Frost was selected because of an original poem which he read before the Men's Club of the Derry Congregational Church. The Reverend Charles Merriam, minister of the church and friend to Frost, made sure of the attendance of Mr. John C. Chase at the reading, for Mr. Chase was not only the Big Man of the Town, as owner of the Chase mills, but he was also a trustee of Pinkerton Academy, and as such, it was necessary that he favor Frost's candidacy.

The poem which earned for Frost the position as teacher was "The Tuft of Flowers". One has but to read it through to see why even a business man was impressed by its philosophy.

* "I went to turn the grass once after one
Who mowed it in the dew before the sun.

The dew was gone that made his blade so keen
Before I came to view the levelled scene.

I looked for him behind an isle of trees;
I listened for his whetstone on the breeze.

But he had gone his way, the grass all mown,
And I must be, as he had been, -alone.

'As all must be,' I said within my heart,
'Whether they work together or apart.'

But as I said it, swift there passed me by
On noiseless wing a bewildered butterfly.

Seeking with memories grown dim o'er night
Some resting flower of yesterday's delight.

And once I marked his flight go round and round
As where some flower lay withering on the ground.

And then he flew as far as eye could see,
And then on tremulous wing came back to me.

I thought of questions that have no reply
And would have turned to toss the grass to dry,

But he turned first, and led my eye to look
At a tall tuft of flowers beside a brook.

A leaping tongue of bloom the scythe had spared
Beside a reedy brook the scythe had bared.

I left my place to know them by their name,
Finding them butterfly weed when I came.

The mower in the dew had loved them thus,
By leaving them to flourish, not for us,

Nor yet to draw one thought of ours to him,
But from sheer morning gladness at the brim.

The butterfly and I had lit upon,
Nevertheless, a message from the dawn,

That made me hear the wakening birds around
And hear his long scythe whispering to the ground

And feel a spirit kindred to my own;
So that henceforth I worked no more alone;

But glad with him, I worked as with his aid,
And weary, sought at noon with him the shade;

But he had, gone his way, the grass all mown,
And I must be, as he had been, alone.

'As all must be,' I said within my heart,
'Whether they work together or apart.'

But as I said it, swift there passed me by
On noiseless wing a bewildered butterfly.

Seeking with memories grown dim of old night
Some resting flower of yesterday's delight.

And once I marked his flight so round and round
As where some flower lay withering on the ground.

And then he flew as far as eye could see,
And then on tremulous wing came back to me.

I thought of questions that have no reply
And would have turned to pass the grass to dry.

But he turned first, and led my eye to look
At a tall tuft of flowers beside a brook.

A sleeping tongue of bloom the scythe had spared
Beside a ready brook the scythe had barred.

I left my place to know them by their name,
Finding them butterfly weed when I came.

The mower in the dew had loved them thus,
By leaving them to flourish, not for us.

For yet to draw one thought of ours to him,
But from sheer morning blindness at the dim.

The butterfly and I had lit upon
Nevertheless, a message from the dawn.

That made me hear the wakening birds around
And hear his long scythe whispering to the ground.

And feel a spirit kindred to my own;
So that henceforth I worked no more alone.

But glad with him, I worked as with his aid,
And weary, sought at noon with him the shade.

And dreaming, as it were, held brotherly speech
With one whose thought I had not hoped to reach.

'Men work together,' I told him from the heart
'Whether they work together or apart.' "

Needless to say, Mr. Chase was impressed so favorably that a place in the English department of Pinkerton was found for a man who could write such a beautiful and unusual description of a commonplace early morning mowing. "The wakening birds around", "the long scythe whispering to the ground" meant something to every villager present at the reading, but they had never heard it put into words before. Most of all they appreciated the spirit of brotherhood, the change in philosophy brought about by a simple clump of flowers left standing by the early morning mower and seen and meditated upon by Robert Frost; and so-

* "'The Tuft of Flowers' got me my first real job," smiles Mr. Frost. "Whole family owe their life to this poem, and they'd better believe it."

In talking with teachers and pupils who worked with Frost during his Pinkerton days, I have found none who thought him marked for later fame. The teachers said that he was "different"; the pupils spoke of the carelessness of his attire and the untidiness of his hair. One pupil suggested that the Pinkerton faculty was hostile to Frost because he was negligent about his appearance and informal in

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Mr. Frost. "While family owe their life to this poem, and
they'd better believe it."

In talking with teachers and pupils who worked with

Frost during his Hinkerton days, I have found none who
thought him marked for later fame. The teachers said that
he was "different"; the pupils spoke of the carelessness of
his attire and the untidiness of his hair. One pupil sug-
gested that the Hinkerton family was hostile to Frost be-
cause he was negligent about his appearance and informed in

his classroom procedure, and most of all because he had no college degree. This suggestion was stoutly denied, however, by a retired teacher who lives within the shadow of Pinkerton, a delightful person named Miss Sylvia Clarke. She not only worked with Mr. Frost, but she lived very near him after he gave up his house on the Turnpike and moved into Derry Village so as to be near to the academy. Frost would often stop at the Clarke house on the way home from school to eat a freshly-baked cookie that Mother Clarke had just taken from the oven and to enjoy a friendly chat. For Miss Sylvia Clarke he wrote a poem, poking fun at her because she was displeased at his reaction to a sunset which she called him to see one night when classes were over. The morning after the sunset episode he came quietly into her room before school, dropped a little yellow folded paper onto her desk, and quietly walked out again. She opened it at once and read:

"Miss C. gave a sunset party
 At a western window in chapel,
 And because our delight wasn't hearty
 Or we couldn't find words to grapple
 With the ravishing skyscape,
 Miss C. got as mad as a taurus.
 She appealed to the innate calf in us
 If the gold wasn't here diaphanous,
 There hard and metallic and glittering.
 Then, maddened by our tittering
 At her words diaphanous, metallic,
 She called us dolicho-cephalic
 And everything awful, but feminine.

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it at once and read:

"Miss C. gave a sunset party
At a western window in chapel,
And because our delight wasn't hearty
Or we couldn't find words to describe
With the ravishing sky-scapes,
Miss C. got us out as a treat.
She appealed to the ladies' call in no
It told us not to fuss or fuss,
There were no words to describe
Then, madam of our sitting
At her words highness, excellency,
She called us holiness, excellency
And everything went, out running."

Said she wouldn't have nobody run down
Or in any way oppress a person in
Her beautiful A-I and down.
R. T. "

Miss Clarke preserved this "original manuscript"
for years, but last Christmas, generous soul that she is,
gave it to Professor Robert Newton of Ohio State Univer-
sity, an ardent collector of Frost material, for the rea-
son that he coveted it more than anything else in the
world. He immediately had it photographed and presented
her with a photostatic copy, which she has treasured on her
living room wall.

No analysis, this slender little verse, written for
him so many years ago, is so realistic that Frost has not
changed much through the years. As he says himself in the
first poem in his first book of verses, speaking of the fu-
ture:

"They would not find me changed from him
they know-
Only more sure of all I thought was true."

Just a bit of rhymed teasing it is, and not meant for
publication, and yet it shows the same characteristics
found in his serious work.

For example, he has mentioned the "fiddling felle-
en Galt" and he has used the Latin phrase in place of "felle-
en Galt" in his feeling for and his constant allusion to the
classical. His description of the sunset as a "revelation"

skyscape shows his genius in picturing an every-day occurrence in an unusual manner. The tittering attendant upon Miss Clarke's use of many-syllabled adjectives has been done in a spirit of jocularly, but it is an indication that Frost prefers simplicity in the choice of words.

"Squeeze a lemon in" shows an ear attuned to the youthful conversation about him, for that expression was the last word in the slang of the early 1900's, and its use reveals a love of fun that is very characteristic of Mr. Frost.

The entire rhyme is expressed in the medium which Robert Frost originated and in which he excels: conversational poetry, verse which sounds like ordinary talk and which must be read with natural inflections. Last, but by no means least, the friendly gesture of rhyming the incident for Miss Clarke's enjoyment is but typical of Frost's capacity for friendship; of his desire to please the folks whom he likes. Hence, though the little rhyme seems just simple and funny at first glance, subsequent readings bring out the fact that there is a lot more to it than meets the eye, a characteristic of every line that Robert Frost has ever written.

It was on the blackboard at Pinkerton that Robert Frost first wrote the following formula as a guide for his classes in composition-writing-one which all teachers of

38

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The entire rhyme is expressed in the medium which Robert Frost originated and in which he excels: conversational poetry, verses which sound like ordinary talk and which must be read with natural inflections. Just, but by no means least, the friendly gesture of turning the incident for Miss Clarke's enjoyment is but typical of Frost's respect for friendship; of his desire to please the folks whom he likes. Hence, though the little rhyme seems just

simple and funny at first glance, subsequent readings bring out the fact that there is a lot more to it than meets the eye, a characteristic of every line that Robert Frost has ever written.

It was on the blackboard at Hinkerton that Robert Frost first wrote the following formula as a guide for his classes in composition-writing-one which all teachers of

English would do well to use:

Uncommon in experience	-	Uncommon in writing
Common in experience	-	Common in writing
Uncommon in experience	-	Common in writing
Common in experience	-	Uncommon in writing

The last, of course, was the kind of writing which Mr. Frost did and the kind he urged his classes to do.

Robert Frost's teaching was of the highest order as measured by present-day standards. Not only did he recognize pupil-interests and individual differences in the classroom, but he also plunged whole-heartedly into what we now call extra-curricular activities, such as the school paper, the football team, hiking club, and dramatics.

Pinkerton's paper, the Critic, reached new heights under the direction of Mr. Frost, although he allowed the staff to practically run it themselves, coming in with "the right touch at the right moment". In this case the right moment was after an edition was off the press, while the right touch was taking a whole period with each English class to discuss the edition from cover to cover, asking for criticisms. Every pupil in the school had an opportunity to air his views, making the Critic a school paper in the truest sense of the word; while the editorial staff was given the chance to get many worth-while suggestions for improvement from the public it wished to please.

It is rumored that in emergencies the new English

English would be well to use:

Johnson in experience - Johnson in writing
Johnson in experience - Johnson in writing
Johnson in experience - Johnson in writing
Johnson in experience - Johnson in writing

This last, of course, was the kind of writing which Mr.

Trout did and the kind he urged his classes to do.

Trout's writing was of the highest order as

evidenced by present-day standards. Not only did he write

with logical-therapeutic and individual differences in the

classroom, but he also planned whole-heartedly into what

we now call extra-curricular activities, such as the school

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opportunity to air his views, making the little a school

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tions for improvement from the pupils it wished to please.

It is thought that in introducing the new English

teacher even wrote poems for the paper, and one, "The Later Minstrel", was printed on slips for use in chapel as a hymn. A former pupil of Frost's, Harriette M. Tibbetts, says in a letter:

"I was a Senior at Pinkerton Academy when Robert Frost came to teach English there-1906-1907. He had lived on a small farm, but was not a success as a farmer and was glad to get the position of teacher. He had begun to write then, and "The Later Minstrel" we used as a hymn in chapel.

Mr. Frost was a great admirer of Longfellow, and the last two lines of the third verse are taken from one of his poems, and of course he refers to him as "the bard" in the first line of the same verse.

Remember some departed day
When, bathed in autumn gold,
You wished for some sweet song and sighed
For minstrel days of old.

And that same golden autumn day
Perhaps the fates would bring
At eve, one knocking at your heart
With perfect songs to sing.

You knew that never bard on earth
Did wander wide as he
Who sang the long, long thoughts of Youth,
The Secret of the Sea.

You knew not when he might not come;
But while he made delays,
You wronged the wisdom that you had
And sighed for vanished days.

Song's times and seasons are its own,
Its ways past finding out,
But more and more it fills the earth
And triumphs over doubt.

We did enjoy Mr. Frost as a teacher. He was so much younger and more human than the majority of the faculty at that time. NOW we appreciate them ALL!"

Besides writing hymns for chapel, Frost composed

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We did enjoy Mr. Frost as a teacher. He was so much
younger and more human than the majority of the faculty at
that time. Now we appreciate them all!"

Besides writing hymns for chapel, Frost composed

football songs to be sung at a Victory Supper, held to celebrate the defeat of a rival high school, Sanborn Seminary; and one jolly song began:

In the days of Captain John
Sanborn Sem had nothing on
Pinkerton, Pinkerton!

Frost probably had as much fun writing the words as the youngsters did singing them, for not only did he enjoy youthful high spirits, but he was also very enthusiastic about football. A former member of the Pinkerton squad, John Bartlett by name, wrote to Gorham Munson:

* "Robert Frost was a frequent figure on the athletic field, and would sometimes take off his coat and make a bluff, as the boys called it, at playing. One afternoon he happened to come near me. He asked several questions concerning where....the Devil's Den, about which I had written, was located....In a matter-of-fact way he observed that I was a fellow who had ideas....He seemed to show in this conversation several times the interest in me that other teachers had. He really had this interest, not directed toward me alone, but toward all his students."

Like all real teachers, Frost knew how to bring out the hidden genius of the shy and retiring and how to repress the arrogance of the cocksure. His classes were called "easy" classes, in that formal discipline was unknown; but when one learns that not only was the regular work in English successfully accomplished, but that such plays as Milton's Comus, Marlowe's Dr. Faustus, and Yeats's Land of the Heart's Desire were performed in an estimable

Football songs to be sung at a Victory Dinner, held to raise the spirit of a rival high school, Gannett School, and one jolly song began:

To the boys of Captain John
Bannister we say
Pinkerton, Pinkerton!

That progress had as much to do with the boys as the
youngsters all singing them, for not only did he enjoy
youthful high spirits, but he was also very enthusiastic
about football. A former member of the Pinkerton squad,
John Bannister by name, wrote to Gordon Hanson:

"Robert Frost was a tremendous figure on the athletic
field, and would sometimes take the lead and make a
dash, as the boys called it, at playing. One afternoon
he happened to come near me. He asked several questions
concerning where... the Devil's Den, about which I had
written, and about... In a matter-of-fact way he seemed
that I was a fellow who was interested in the fact of
this conversation several times the interest in me that
other teachers had. He really had this interest, not direct
ed toward me alone, but toward all his students."

Like all real teachers, Frost knew how to bring out
the hidden genius of the shy and reticent and how to re-
press the arrogance of the cocky. His classes were
called "easy" classes, in that formal discipline was un-
known; but when one learned that not only was the regular
work in English successfully accomplished, but that the
play of William's "Tome", Markham's "The Tenth", and Frost's
Land of the Heart's Desire were assigned in an excellent

manner by the students, coached by this man who held no college degree, one mentally awards Frost a degree magna cum laude of Master of the Art of Teaching!

In addition to inspiring the Derry children to such high standards of work in the schoolhouse and on the athletic field, Frost often went hiking with groups of his boys and showed them how to find satisfying adventures right in their own neighborhood. A winter walk might bring about a meeting with a logging team, whereupon Frost would stop the driver and ask him all kinds of intelligent questions about the logging industry, while the boys would listen "all ears" to the conversation. A walk in the spring of the year might produce a rare fern or flower which would inspire Frost to an interesting discourse on Botany, about which he knew a great deal. A starry summer evening sky overhead would often call forth an enthusiastic talk on astronomy and the wonders of the heavens. On a brisk fall hike, the appetizing smell of doughnuts frying might prompt a suggestion from Frost that he and the boys seek out the farmhouse and buy doughnuts hot from the kettle, meanwhile enjoying a chat with the lady of the house.

In all seasons of the year, at school and afield, Robert Frost succeeded in glorifying the commonplace for all those fortunate youngsters with whom he came into intimate contact. Small wonder it was, then, that with his ex-

cellent methods of teaching and inspiring his pupils, he should be greatly appreciated by the two men who presided over the destinies of Pinkerton, each in his turn, while Frost was there. The first principal, George W. Bingham, a stern old man who believed in the classical tradition and taught his Latin classes with thoroughness and zeal, was so impressed with the kind of plays that his new English teacher was producing successfully that he offered him the communion service to use in scenes in the palace of Circe. The magnanimity of this gesture from a pious old New England church member speaks volumes for the personality of Frost, teaching in a school where card playing was forbidden, church service compulsory, and being out after seven at night absolutely prohibited.

In 1909, when the new principal, Ernest L. Silver, brought new rules and new subjects and new teachers to Pinkerton, he, too, was impressed by the excellence of the English teacher already there. Two years later, when Mr. Silver was promoted to the principalship of Plymouth Normal School and wanted on his faculty teachers with personality and vision, teachers with more of the human and less of the academic touch, teachers from whom inspiration would be "caught", he immediately thought of Frost... Let him but etch his incomparable Frostwork upon the windows of the souls of these embryonic teachers and they

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 lish teacher was producing successfully that he altered
 the old curriculum so that it was in accord with the plans
 of the new. The responsibility of this change was a heavy one
 for the English teacher, as he was the only one for the general-
 ly of the school, and being in a school where the English was
 forbidden, almost entirely compulsory, and being out after
 seven at night absolutely prohibited.
 In 1909, when the new principal, Ernest J. Silver,
 brought new rules and new subjects and new teachers to
 the school, he, too, was impressed by the excellence of
 the English teacher already there. Two years later, when
 Mr. Silver was promoted to the principalship of the high
 school, the English teacher was named as his faculty teacher with
 responsibility and vision, teachers with some of the best
 and some of the most able, teachers from whom the school
 would be "caught", he was the English teacher of the school.
 Let him put his own stamp upon the school upon the win-
 dows of the souls of these children teachers and they

would see the value of being human and friendly and sincere in the classroom. Mr. Silver invited Mr. Frost to Plymouth, and it is interesting to note that the combination of two associated names once again proved both natural and happy, for "Silver-Frost" together brought a sparkle into many a student's life.

Mr. Frost was not asked to teach English, but was placed in the Psychology department. There was a subject badly in need of vitalizing, for the psychology of those days was a dreary affair of memorizing parts of the nervous system along with definitions of In-and De-duction, Per- and Apper-ception and the like, with very little idea as to what it was all about. What a privilege it was, then, for the fortunate students at Plymouth Normal to have as teacher a man who could make psychology come alive; who could present it as the fascinating subject it really is. The P. N. S. class of 1912 worked out their own principles of psychology by close study of their own habits and intelligent observation of daily living about them, as well as by discussion of Plato's Republic and Rousseau's Emile.

* "I found that Mr. Frost was having exciting times teaching psychology-improving his own courses and having the girls read real books," says Sidney Cox, now a professor of English at Dartmouth, but for the year 1911-1912 an English teacher at Plymouth High School.

* This and the following quotations of Sidney Cox from G. B. Munson: Robert Frost pp. 51-56

He and Mr. Frost enjoyed a stimulating friendship during that year, in the light of which Mr. Cox pays the following tributes to his friend:

"I met Mr. Frost in the fall of 1911 at a Normal School dance where both of us were against the wall. The next day he came to high school to ask me to go for a walk. I went, and when I reached home, I had felt from that one talk, as I had never done before, what the real nature of poetry is. Scales had been gently lifted off my eyes."

.....

"It was on a walk at the end of which Mr. Frost treated me at the drug store to the delectable beverage of white grape juice that he first made me realize the absurdity of letting students write compositions on the adventures of a penny, and gave me a realizing sense of the difference between unconditioned speculation and creative imagination"

.....

"He invariably made me see something new. I first learned of Whitman from him, and found that he was what I should formerly have considered objectionable, and ...that it wouldn't do to dismiss him because my taboo was infringed."

An exceptional tribute this, and applicable to few:

"Frost was always interested in people, and never spoke of anyone slightly. On the other hand, he was keenly aware of shams and stupidities, and he was not tender towards them."

Many a delightful evening did Sidney Cox spend in the comfortable living room of Frost's little white house at Plymouth, New Hampshire—a room with its bookcase filled "with a lot of attractive books". At random Frost would select a play, a story or volume of verse and read aloud to a small but appreciative audience, consisting of his wife, his friend Cox, and maybe Mr. Silver, who lived with

* Underlining by present writer.

is and Mr. Frost enjoyed a stimulating friendship during that year, in the light of which Mr. Cox gave the following tribute to his friend:

"I met Mr. Frost in the fall of 1911 at a General School Cannon where both of us were assigned the work. The next day he came to visit me, and we went to go for a walk. I went, and when I reached home, I had left from that one talk, as I had never come before, that the real nature of poetry and poetry had been entirely lifted off my eyes."

"It was on a walk at the end of which Mr. Frost treated me at the very store to the delightful surprise of while Frost's little words as recalled the summer of 1911, and the composition on the 1911-12 year of a penny, and gave me a realising sense of the difference between unadorned observation and creative imagination."

"He invariably made me and sometimes me, I think, learned of William from him, and found that he was that I should formerly have considered questionable, and ... that it wouldn't be to him as his message of peace was in-
fringed."

An exceptional tribute this, and especially to Frost: "Frost was always interested in people, and never spoke of anyone slightly. On the other hand, he was hard on some of names and attitudes, and he was not kinder to some than."

Many a delightful evening did Henry Cox spend in the comfortable living room of Frost's little white house at Lyndonville, New Hampshire--a room with its bookcase filled with a lot of attractive books. At random Frost would select a play, a story or volume of verse and read aloud to a small but appreciative audience, consisting of his wife, his friend Mr. Oliver, and maybe Mr. Oliver, who lived with

the Frosts that year. While Mr. Cox enjoyed every syllable which fell from the lips of his friend, he particularly enjoyed Synge's Playboy of the Western World and Mr. Dooley because Robert Frost could do the Irish so well.


Cox does not say whether or not Mr. Frost included anything so common as "Casey At The Bat" in his Irish repertoire, but he may have, as he was a baseball enthusiast. He gave Cox many helpful hints when he was made coach of the Plymouth High baseball nine, and even taught a clever fast throw to shortstop, when there were runners on first and third bases, to catch the man stealing home; and he also demonstrated three highly successful cuts to use in serving a tennis ball.

Diversified as were his interests and successful as was his teaching career, Robert Frost's great urge was still to write poetry; to win recognition as the author of a new kind of "talking" verse. When, at the close of the school year at Plymouth, he came into possession of quite a large sum of money from the sale of his farm at Derry, he decided that he would leave teaching before it claimed him for life service; that he would make one last attempt to establish himself as a poet.

This decision was made in spite of the fact that out of all the magazines in this country only two, The Forum and The Youth's Companion, had accepted any of his

work, and they but little. Even though the editors of the best American periodicals of the day refused his verse, Robert Frost still had faith in the vision to which he had consecrated himself at fifteen. He realized that the trouble with these American editors was that they feared ridicule if they published as poetry anything so far-removed from the ivory-tower conception of that period as was his work. "To be original was to be damned", particularly when the originality took the form of anything so simple, so commonplace, so like ordinary talk. Anything so down to earth, so easy to understand could not be Poetry; anyone so humble and usual could not be a Poet!

Here, then, was a solid wall of editorial prejudice which Frost could not penetrate, and so he determined to strike at fresh fields. He considered Canada, because his good friend John Bartlett, the former Pinkerton student, was successfully located at Vancouver, B. C. and wanted the Frosts there with him. He thought of England, also, and when he made inquiries, found that the cost of living was very reasonable there if one avoided the big cities and rented a house in the English countryside. To dwell in a thatched-roof cottage by the side of a road in Merrie England was the unanimous choice of the whole Frost family, for it seemed like a dream come true. And so it happened that in September of 1912, when all the other children in



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England was the unanimous choice of the whole Frost family,
for it seemed like a dream come true. And so it happened
that in September of 1912, when all the other children in

America were being admonished by fond parents to be good girls and good boys in school, the four Frost children, Leslie, Carol, Irma, and Marjorie, were on the high seas, being warned by their anxious parents to be very, very careful, in order that the whole family might land intact on English shores, with no "de-Frosting", as it were.

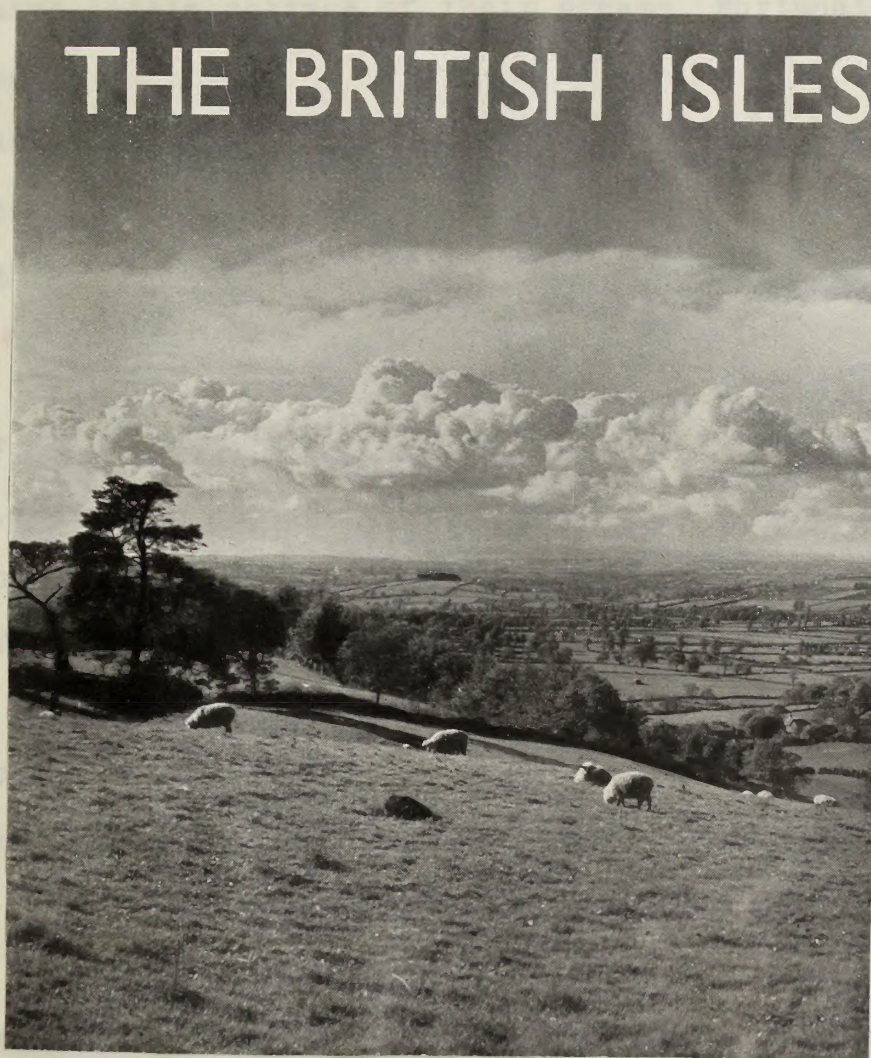
It is singular that Harriett Monroe should bring out her first copy of Poetry, A Magazine of Verse the very month after the departure of the Frost family, for it was just such unknown and original poets as Frost that Miss Monroe wished to bring before an American public surfeited with imitations of Longfellow and Tennyson-but with none of their genius. It was probably for the best, however, for it added greatly to Frost's prestige to be first recognized in the literary capitol of the world, besides gratifying for him a secret desire to be printed first in London, a desire born of his great admiration for a book published there in 1885, Palgrave's Golden Treasury. It seems, in fact, as though Fate decreed that Frost should be gone when America would have recognized him as a poet, for England gave him, for a few golden years, all of the real riches of life: a happy home, leisurely surroundings, satisfying occupation, congenial friends, and the wish of a life come true, recognition and publication as a first-rate Poet!

CHAPTER FOUR

C H A P T E R F O U R

FROST IN THE ENGLISH COUNTRY-SIDE

THE BRITISH ISLES



C H A P T E R F O U R

FROST IN THE ENGLISH COUNTRY-SIDE

Quietly and unostentatiously the Frost family landed in England and went at once to T. P.'s Weekly to see whereabouts in the English country-side they could find the quiet little cottage of their dreams. Fortunately they happened to consult an employee who had been a London policeman or Bobby (as they are always called); and he had the desired information right at his tongue's end, for, as Arthur Guiterman truly says:

* "The finest thing in London is the Bobby.
Benignant information is his hobby."

He advised them to settle at Beaconsfield in Buckinghamshire, where Frost could have quiet and leisure for writing and arranging his verse, and yet be near enough to make frequent trips up to London in search of a publisher.

Once the choice of material had been made and the collection to be known as A Boy's Will had been put together, Frost again sought information from the former Bobby as to what English firm would be likely to accept verse which was not only American but quite original. He was pleased when his advisor suggested the firm of David Nutt, for Nutt's name was familiar to Frost as the publisher of the verses of Henley, a favorite of his.

* A. Guiterman: "The London Bobby"; The Magic Carpet p.54

Neither Frost nor his counselor knew that David Nutt was dead, and Frost, therefore, applied for an appointment with Mr. Nutt in person. When he finally succeeded in obtaining this appointment, he was surprised to find, in place of an English gentleman, a mysterious foreign lady in black, who seemed to speak with authority. Frost left his manuscript with her with very little hope that it would be accepted, and with some misgivings as to her right to take over Mr. Nutt's appointments; but when the book was actually accepted, the identity of the mysterious lady was established as none other than Mr. Nutt's widow, a brilliant French woman who was really managing the publishing business, but letting it appear, with true Victorian nicety, that a man was still at the head.

Robert Frost was now almost forty, at the beginning of the autumn of life, and success was particularly sweet, for it was twenty years and more that he had been trying vainly to have his poems printed. At long last his faith in himself as a born poet was confirmed by the acceptance of his work, strictly on its own merits, by one of the finest and best-known publishing houses in the British Isles. That the publisher's name should be Nutt recalls the old superstition of things happening by threes, for this was the third occasion in Frost's life

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when a natural association of names brought about a successful combination of personalities. Frost--Nutt's--the autumn of life--what more natural than that Frost should break the shell of British reserve when trying for this particular opening; that from his association with Nutt's fine fruits should come? White-Frost, Silver-Frost, Nutt's and Frost--all the most natural of combinations and all bringing success and happiness into Frost's life!

Between the time of acceptance and that of publication of his first volume of verse, Robert Frost went oftentimes up to London to explore that most fascinating of all large cities. On one of his tours of exploration he saw a sign announcing that Harold Monro's Poetry Book Shop was to open that evening with a reception for writers, and that some of the authors would read from their works.

Thinking, no doubt, that his many years at the writing game and his final acceptance for publication made him eligible to attend any affair for authors, Frost boldly turned the toes of his American boots right in through the doorway of the Book Shop and directed them over toward the staircase, where he spied a seat amongst a friendly group of people already sitting all the way up to the top step. Shoes which were unmistakably American attracted the attention of one of the stair-sitters, F. S. Flint,

and he immediately spoke to their wearer: asked who he was and from what part of the States he had come. When Frost explained that he was a poet from New England, he was asked what he thought of a compatriot of his, an American poet who was quite the lion of literary London of that year, a man named Ezra Pound. Frost, honest as always, confessed that the name meant nothing to him, whereupon Flint cautioned him to never reveal this fact to Pound, if the two should meet-and he made a mental reservation that they would meet, and soon.

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Shortly afterwards, at Flint's suggestion, Pound sent Frost an informal invitation to call, and was quite chagrined when the invitation was not promptly accepted. When Frost did get around to making a call, he was received rather coolly, for Pound had decided that this New Englander was Frost by name and Frost by nature, and therefore impossible of cultivation. So attractive was Frost's personality, however, and so friendly and sincere did he show himself to be, that Pound's chagrin completely disappeared, and he ended by hailing Frost as a fellow-artist and a brother.

The moment that Pound learned that Frost's first book of verse was already in the press, nothing would do but that he and Frost should seize their hats and dash immediately to David Nutt's publishing house to obtain

whatever proof sheets were available in order that he, Ezra Pound, might give his opinion as to whether or no Frost's poetry was good, bad or indifferent. He pronounced it good, so good that he insisted upon saying so publicly, and he reviewed it favorably when it was finally published, as, indeed, did the entire literary press of England.

For example, said one review:

*"One feels that this man has seen and felt; seen with a revelatory, a creative vision; felt personally and intensely, and he simply writes down, without confusion or affectation, the results thereof. Rarely today is it our good fortune to fall in with a new poet expressing himself in so pure a vein. No one who really cares for poetry should miss this little book."

The critic's name was not quoted, as the review was anonymous, but he must have pleased Frost greatly when he went on to say:

"We have not the slightest idea who Mr. Robert Frost may be, but we welcome him unhesitatingly to the ranks of the poets born."

In Ford Madox Ford's English Review Norman Douglas, while praising Frost, grasped an opportunity to say something about poets across the sea:

†"It does one good to glance for awhile into the simple, woodland philosophy of Mr. Frost. Nowhere on earth, we fancy, is there more outrageous nonsense printed under the name of poetry than in America; and our author, we are told, is an American. All the more credit to him for breaking away from this tradition-if such it can be called-and giving us not derivative, hypersensuous drivel, but an image of things really seen and heard."

Frost must have been gratified to read what Douglas thought of the kind of poetry American editors had been accepting as printable during the twenty years they had kept rejecting his original verse.

Because Frost's poetry did have an image of things really seen and heard, and because he was a friend of Ezra Pound's and F.S. Flint's, he was supposed by many to be a member of a group of prominent writers whom Pound had christened "The Imagists" in view of the fact that at their weekly meetings at a Soho Restaurant they discussed New Poetry in general and The Image in particular. This Thursday Night Club, founded originally by T.E. Hulme, poet and philosopher, in his search for the basic principles underlying all poetry, had, among its members, Pound, Flint, Richard Aldington, and H. D. or Hilda Doolittle, who later became the wife of Aldington.

The general aims of an Imagist seem to have been:

1. to start by forming a clear image in his own mind;
 2. to express this image in so concentrated a form that the reader could easily picture the "thing" expressed;
 3. to recognize no limits in his choice of subject-matter;
 4. to use common speech and the EXACT word;
 5. to create rhythms expressive of the mood.
- Robert Frost believed in some of these aims, of course, but he did not choose to

be identified with any group, though he attended the Thursday Club and many other writers' functions as a protégé of Ezra Pound's.

After the publication of his first volume of verse, Frost immediately started to work on a second, and in 1914 sent to David Nutt's the completed manuscript of the now famous North of Boston. In a recent lecture Frost revealed that he owed to our own Boston Globe a debt of thanks for this arresting title which used to appear again and again merely as a geographical location in the advertisements of summer resorts and farms for sale featured in that paper. No sooner had North of Boston been published than it was loudly acclaimed by other writers, by the critics, and by the British public. Quotations from a few reviews will indicate how the genius of Frost was appreciated in England; how the very essence of his poetry seemed to be revealed to his English readers from the very first.

Ezra Pound's article commented on the "living speech"

*"Mr. Frost has dared to write, and for the most part with success, in the natural speech of New England; in natural spoken speech, which is very different from the 'natural' speech of the newspapers and of many professors. His poetry is a bit slow, but you aren't held up every five minutes by the feeling that you are listening to a fool; so perhaps you read it just as easily and quickly as you might read the verse of some of the sillier and more 'vivacious' writers."

Edward Garnett ended a long appreciation of Frost

by offering thanks for his originality:

*"Mr. Frost is a true poet, but not a poetical poet," remarked a listener to whom I read 'A Servant to Servants', leaving me to wonder whether his verdict inclined the scales definitely to praise or blame. Of poetical poets we have so many! of literary poets so many! of drawing-room poets so many! of academic and dilettanti poets so many! of imitative poets so many! but of original poets how few!"

Lascelles Abercrombie, teacher, critic, and poet, wrote of his admiration of Frost's careful delineation of New England life:

†"The first and the most obvious novelty in Mr. Frost's poems is their determination to deal unequivocally with everyday life in New England North of Boston.... These specimens of New England life are not greatly different from the corresponding life of Old England; yet there IS an unmistakable difference, on which it would not be easy to lay one's finger. The life seems harder and lonelier, and it also seems, oddly enough, more reflective and philosophic.... It is life that has, on the whole, a pretty hard time of it, though a queer, dry, yet cordial humor seldom fails it; but it is life that has time to look at itself as well as to look about itself."

Those of us who are descendants of old New England stock cannot help but marvel at the perfect description of the way a Yankee looks at life which Mr. Abercrombie has conceived, not from first-hand observation, but from reading the poems of Frost. Both the poet and the critic are shown to be the possessors of keen insight, and it is not to be wondered at that they became intimate friends. So intimate were they, in fact, that the entire Frost family moved from Beaconsfield to Little Iddens in Gloucestershire to live near the Abercrombies, whose house, "The

*E. Garnett: Friday Nights pp. 221-242

† Recognition of Robert Frost p. 24

Gallows", was hidden away out in the country in the midst of * "some short-grassed fields....

Red-clayed and pleasant, which the
young spring fills
With the never-quiet joy of dancing
daffodils"

as described by England's John Masefield. In this delightful neighborhood dwelt another good friend, Wilfred Gibson, in a cottage quaintly named "The Old Nailshop". Mr. Gibson spoke of the universality of Frost's poems in his review:

† "Mr. Frost has a keen, humorous sense of character. Tales that might be mere anecdotes in the hands of another poet take on a universal significance, because of their native veracity and truth to local character."

The dramatic quality of the work was noted by another critic and essayist, Edward Thomas, who said :

† "This is a collection of dramatic narratives in verse."

Thomas moved his wife and three children into a farm next door to the Frost family for the summer holidays, and Frost and Thomas became the most intimate friends. Thomas was in rather bad health, for in addition to his many articles of criticism, he had written at least one book a year for several years, for which he had received only one pound per thousand words. He was a shy, sensitive man, naturally inclined toward melancholy, and he found in Frost an antidote for melancholia besides a peer in literary ability.

The four families of Abercrombies, Thomases, Gibsons,

*John Masefield: The Daffodil Fields pp. 1 & 2

† Recognition of Robert Frost p. 29

† G. B. Munson: Robert Frost p. 124

We sojourn by the Western sea.

And yet

Was it for nothing that the little room
All golden in the lamplight thrilled with golden
Laughter from hearts of friends that summer
night?

Darkness has fallen on it, and the shadow
May never more be lifted from the hearts
That went through those black years of death,
and live.

And still, whenever men and women gather
For talk and laughter on a summer night,
Shall not that lamp rekindle, and the room
Glow once again alive with light and laughter,
And like a singing star in time's abyss
Burn golden-hearted through oblivion?

Golden-hearted indeed were the glorious days in the daffodil country with their picnics and botanizing expeditions, their walks and their talks. A favorite walk of Frost's and Thomas's was up May Hill, from the top of which they could enjoy a matchless view of the countryside while they sat and talked and talked about everything that was in their hearts, but mostly of writing.

Up to the time he met Robert Frost, Edward Thomas had never attempted to create verse. In these hilltop conversations Frost tried to convince Thomas that he could write poetry as beautifully as he did prose; and so well did Frost succeed that in the short space of life left to him, Thomas composed a volume of verse and dedicated it to Frost. That is what Gibson means when he says that Thomas "Died just as life had touched his lips to song."

One of the poems written by Thomas in his little more than a year of writing verse was a tribute to the golden hours of friendship which he and Frost enjoyed during those sunny, summer days in Gloucestershire, called:

*The Sun Used To Shine

The sun used to shine while we two walked
Slowly together, paused and started
Again, and sometimes mused, sometimes talked
As either pleased, and cheerfully parted

Each night. We never disagreed
Which gate to rest on. The to be
And the late past we gave small heed.
We turned from men or poetry

To rumours of the war remote
Only till both stood disinclined
For aught but the yellow flavoured coat
Of an apple wasps had undermined;

Or a sentry of dark betonies,
The stateliest of small flowers on earth,
At the forest verge; or crocuses
Pale purple as if they had their birth

In sunless Hades fields. The war
Came back to mind with the moonrise
Which soldiers in the east afar
Beheld then. Nevertheless our eyes

Could as well imagine the Crusades
Or Caesar's battles. Everything
To faintness like those rumours fades-
Like the brook's waters glittering

Under the moonlight-like those walks
Now-like the two that took them, and
The fallen apples, all the talks
And silences-like memory's sand

When the tide covers it late or soon,
And other men through other flowers
In those fields under the same moon
Go talking and have easy hours.

A very unusual experience which befell the two men
is found in a beautiful poem by Frost called:

* Iris By Night

One misty evening, one another's guide,
We two were groping down a Malvern side
The last wet fields and dripping hedges home.
There came a moment of confusing lights,
Such as according to belief in Rome
Were seen of old at Memphis on the heights
Before the fragments of a former sun
Could concentrate anew and rise as one.
Light was a paste of pigment in our eyes.
And then there was a moon and then a scene
So watery as to seem submarine;
In which we two stood saturated, drowned.
The clover-mingled rowan on the ground
Had taken all the water it could as dew,
And still the air was saturated too,
Its airy pressure turned to water weight.
Then a small rainbow like a trellis gate,
A very small moon-made prismatic bow,
Stood closely over us through which to go.
And then we were vouchsafed the miracle
That never yet to other two befell
And I alone of us have lived to tell.
A wonder! Bow and rainbow as it bent,
Instead of moving with us as we went,
(To keep the pots of gold from being found)
It lifted from its dewy pediment
Its two mote-swimming many-colored ends,
And gathered them together in a ring.
And we stood in it softly circled round
From all division time or foe can bring
In a relation of elected friends.

When Edward Thomas was gone to his last rest on
the "sunless Hades fields" of battle on Easter Monday in
1917, Robert Frost wrote these words for him:

† To E. T.

I slumbered with your poems on my breast
Spread open as I dropped them half-read through

* A Further Range

† New Hampshire

Like dove wings on a figure on a tomb
To see, if in a dream they brought of you,

I might not have the chance I missed in life
Through some delay, and call you to your face
First soldier, and then poet, and then both,
Who died a soldier-poet of your race.

I meant, you meant, that nothing should remain
Unsaid between us, brother, and this remained-
And one thing more that was not then to say:
The Victory for what it lost and gained.

You went to meet the shell's embrace of fire
On Vimy Ridge; and when you fell that day
The war seemed over more for you than me,
But now for me than you-the other way.

How over, though, for even me who knew
The foe thrust back unsafe across the Rhine,
If I was not to speak of it to you
And see you pleased once more with words of mine?

Another beautiful tribute to Thomas, written by
his dear friend, Walter de la Mere, was this:

* "If one word could tell of his all, that word would
be England....When indeed Edward Thomas was killed in Flan-
ders, a mirror of England was shattered, of so true and
pure a crystal that a clearer and tenderer reflection can
be found in no other than in his poems."

This is the kind of person whom Robert Frost chose
for his most intimate friend in England. Not only Edward
Thomas, but all of Frost's English intimates seem to have
possessed the same qualities which he himself possesses:
sincerity, humility, modesty, and simplicity, as well as
critical ability, insight, brilliancy, and even genius;
and all were lovers of natural beauty. Because he was as
good a man as he was a poet, Robert Frost endeared himself

* W. de la Mere: in Dictionary of National Biography p. 528

to many of the finest people in England, though he was absolutely unknown when he landed there at the age of thirty-eight, a poet in search of a publisher.

The beautiful friendships of these people, the glowing tributes of English critics, the fellowship and appreciation of English writers would have been tendered to Robert Frost eventually, no doubt, through some agency, even if he had not turned his footsteps, uninvited, into Monro's shop; but it satisfies our American sense of adventure that he did do so, did meet Flint in so unusual a manner; that through Flint he met Pound, and through Pound all of England's literary élite.

Other footsteps turning into the doorway of the same bookshop were to make significant imprints upon Frost's life and to help mark the path to his success; feet again shod with American shoes; the feet of an American member of the Imagist group, our own Amy Lowell. Foster Damon, in his book about Miss Lowell, quotes her as saying:

*"In the summer of 1914 I was in London, and on one occasion, when I had strolled into the Poetry Bookshop, I found, lying on the counter, a slim little green cloth volume bearing the alluring title North of Boston. It is a good title even when one discounts any particular bias toward it, but for an expatriated New Englander its appeal was nostalgic and completely irresistible. I bought the book then and there, and all that evening, in the impersonal bleakness of a hotel room, I read this most personal book, until I was saturated with the atmos-

*F. Damon: Amy Lowell, A Chronicle pp. 234 & 235

phere of the New Hampshire hills; and when I went to the window and looked out at the moon, it was not Piccadilly that I saw before my windows, but Monadnock and Dublin Lake shining with moonlight. Young poets are the most intolerant of human beings, and the little group with whom I had allied myself were quite certain that blank verse was an outworn medium, and that le mot juste was the most important factor of poetry. That night taught me a lesson which I have never forgotten. For here was our mot juste embedded in a blank verse so fresh, living, and original that nothing on the score of vividness and straightforward presentation-our shibboleths-could be brought against it. Its feeling was undeniable; its reticence equally so. I immediately took off my hat to the unknown poet, and I have been taking it off ever since in a positively wearying repetition."

Amy Lowell was so impressed by North of Boston that she wanted to share her discovery; wanted all of her countrymen-and Frost's-to know about this New England poet who was being printed in Old England. She stowed her precious copy away in the safest place in her trunk to take it back home with her in order to-but that is a new chapter, for it takes us away from England and back again to these United States of America.

C H A P T E RF I V E

L A T E R F R O S T

FROST~
THE FULL MAN

"FROST has humor and whimsicality and mellowness. . . . He has great charm, due largely to the casual atmosphere with which he invests his verse. It is as if he had met a friend in a chance encounter and stopped to tell him a local tale. It is only later when one reverts to the story and notes its fine shadings that he sees the careful artist back of the colloquial raconteur. The illusion of direct contact with the poet, is due to the idiom which he employs, to the speech quality with which he manages to imbue the lyric. There is nothing negative in Frost's nature, and while he knows the pity and the tragedy of life, he never pronounces it futile. One feels that he regards it as richly worth while, that he has never lost his sense of its wonder. One is conscious of the full man in Frost, of one who has personally lived through much of what he depicts, who has never shunned experience nor scanted his cup however bitter it might be, but found even in its bitterness a certain intoxication.

JESSIE B. RITTENHOUSE in *Braithwaite's
Anthology of Magazine Verse for 1926*

C H A P T E R F I V E

LATER FROST

When Amy Lowell returned to America in the memorable August of 1914, she brought with her, from war-torn England, the "slim little green cloth volume bearing the alluring title North of Boston", and she tried very hard, during the ensuing fall and winter, to interest some publisher in making an American edition. This she was unable to do, but in the meantime Henry Holt and Company had imported about one hundred fifty copies of the book during the last months of 1914 and had brought out an American edition in 1915-some time in January.

Although Amy Lowell was unsuccessful, it was, strangely enough, through a woman's hand that Frost had his first American publication, and the story of this printing is rather reminiscent of his successful encounter with David Nutt's widow in London.

When Robert Frost was living in England, the very first letter which he had received from America in praise of his English edition of North of Boston had come from Four Winds Farm in Stowe, Vermont, from a woman named Holt. She told him how much she and her mother had liked his poems, but she never let on that she was in any

way connected with the publishing house of Henry Holt and Company, when in reality she was the wife of the owner. Frost thought, of course, that she was a Vermont farmer's wife, and he used the letter as proof that even farmers' wives north of Boston were so well-read that they perused his verse, and so well-educated that they wrote letters in beautiful English, as contrasted with the ignorant Americans who sent "fan-mail" to Wilfred Gibson and whose crude letters he was always showing Frost in order to tease him about his fellow-countrymen. Frost had no idea of the real significance of his Vermont correspondence; hence he was amazed to learn that he had an American publisher when he returned to this country in March of 1915. No sooner had he landed than he learned the astounding news through the pages of a periodical; and the conveyor of the news, Amy Lowell, tells the story of the incident in this fashion:

*"With the publication of the book by Messrs. Henry Holt and Company I had nothing to do. However, when I saw it announced here, I at once wrote to The New Republic, then in its infancy, and asked-nay, demanded-to review the volume in the columns of that paper. My request was granted, and I believe I was the first to proclaim the book's amazing quality on this side of the water. But the pleasantest part of the tale is its sequel. For Mr. Frost happened to land in New York during the week when my review was published, and walking up from the wharf he bought a copy of The New Republic at a news-stand and read the review. Not long afterwards I was called to the telephone and a voice said, 'I am Robert Frost; I want to see you; I have read your review.' He came out to see me, and at once began a friendship which on my part has been an ever-increasing admiration of his work and a profound attachment to the man."

When Robert Frost went to Holt's publishing house the day after his return to America in order to allow them to see their author in the flesh as well as to make inquiries as to how they happened to be publishing his book, he was told that the firm was having trouble about getting the American copyright from his English publishers; but through some violation of rules on the part of David Nutt's, Henry Holt and Company were later able to obtain all legal rights to publish Frost's works. In just the first year they had to make five printings of North of Boston, and since that time the sale of the book has run away up into the thousands, so universal is its appeal.

Robert Frost had left America unknown, unhonored, and unsung. He returned to find himself suddenly famous, admired, and quoted up and down the land. This belated recognition, though most gratifying, did not cause Frost to change in the slightest degree from the modest, simple man he had always been. Instead of remaining in New York and basking in the bright light of Fame as he might have, Frost went right back to farming in New Hampshire, this time further north of Boston than before, in the lower interval of the White Mountains near Franconia Notch; and from this location came his next volume of verse published by Holt in 1916, appropriately named Mountain Interval.

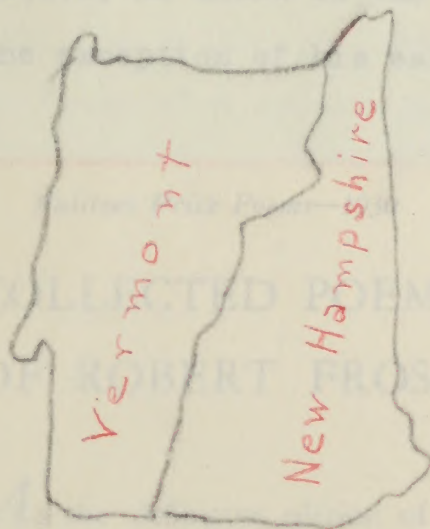
Frost deserted New Hampshire for Vermont in 1920, when he went to live on a hilltop in South Shaftsbury in a rough stone house described by his friend and neighbor, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, as having waited for one hundred thirty years for just such an unusual occupant. Though now a Vermonter, Frost gave his fourth collection of poems, published in 1923, the title New Hampshire, to pay tribute to the state which had contributed much of its content.

In a recent book written by workers of the W.P.A. as a guide to the Granite State, Robert Frost has stated:

* "Not a poem, I believe, in all my six books, from A Boy's Will to A Further Range, but has something in it of New Hampshire. Nearly half my poems must actually have been written in New Hampshire. Every single person in my North of Boston was friend or acquaintance of mine in New Hampshire. I lived, somewhat brokenly, to be sure, in Salem, Derry, Plymouth, and Franconia, New Hampshire, from my tenth to my forty-fifth year. Most of my time out of it, I lived in Lawrence, Massachusetts, on the edge of New Hampshire, where my walks and vacations could be in New Hampshire. My first teaching was in a district school in the southern part of Salem, New Hampshire. Four of my children were born in Derry, New Hampshire. My father was born in Kingston, New Hampshire. My wife's mother was born in New Hampshire. So you see it has been New Hampshire, New Hampshire with me all the way. You will find my poems show it, I think."

At this point it would be well to quote from the poem "New Hampshire", the first in the book of the same name by Frost, lest the natives of Vermont wonder why the poet ever bothered to move to Vermont. Of New Hampshire he says:

"She's one of the two best states in the Union.
 Vermont's the other. And the two have been
 Yoke-fellows in the sap-yoke from of old
 In many Marches. And they lie like wedges,
 Thick end to thin end and thin end to thick end,



And are a figure of the way the strong
 Of mind and strong of arm should fit together,
 One thick where one is thin, and vice versa."

"New Hampshire" was followed by a fifth volume of verse, released for publication in 1928 and given a homely New England title, West-Running Brook; but his 1936 manuscript Frost has called A Further Range, explaining his change from purely "local" titles to one of broad scope in the dedicatory message to his wife:

To E. F.

for what it may mean to her that beyond the
 White Mountains were the Green; beyond both were the
 Rockies, the Sierras, and, in thought, the Andes
 and the Himalayas-range beyond range even into
 the realm of government and religion.

A Further Range won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in '36,
 as had New Hampshire in 1924 and Collected Poems in 1930.

Collected Poems* is a book which every Frost-lover would do well to own, for it contains every poem which Robert Frost has ever written, as shown in the accompanying description, with the exception of his earliest and his latest compositions.

Pulitzer Prize Poems—1930

COLLECTED POEMS OF ROBERT FROST

*A*s the definitive edition of a great American poet, this book becomes at once a work of the first importance. It contains the previously published books, "North of Boston," "A Boy's Will," "Mountain Interval," "New Hampshire," and "West-running Brook," together with six new and heretofore unpublished poems.

A previous collection of his verses was printed in 1923 under the title Selected Poems. This was revised in 1928 and again in 1934, showing that it was and is popular; and it is a fact that all of Frost's books, unlike most volumes of verse, have a great popular appeal.

* The present writer owns an autographed copy from which Frost read aloud to a Harvard audience such favorites as "Mending Wall" and "Birches".

Though his verses are full of the dramatic element, Robert Frost has written only one play, "The Way Out"-unless a little one-page drama which he rhymed for fun be counted as a second. The latter, called "The Cow's In The Corn", was read by Frost at a dinner party given him on his fiftieth birthday by his friends Carl van Doren, Louis Untermeyer, Walter Prichard Eaton, and other folk famous in literary America. Less than a hundred copies of this playlet have been printed privately, but the introduction by the author is worth making public, so clever it is!

"This, my sole contribution to the Celtic Drama (no one so unromantic as not to have made at least one), illustrates the latter day tendency of all drama to become smaller and smaller and to be acted in smaller and smaller theatres to smaller and smaller audiences."*

Frost's real play, "The Way Out", appeared in The Seven Arts in February, 1917, when the author was on the advisory board of that magazine. It is a very short, but highly dramatic offering, for it tells how a murderer found the way out of being apprehended by a posse in pursuit in a most ingenious fashion. Briefly the story tells how the killer has his wits about him enough to flee to a hermit's cottage, put on the old man's one extra suit, find out everything he should know of the old fellow's past by quick, pertinent questioning; then, by knocking the old man insensible, to get rid of him.

When the people who are tracking the criminal finally arrive at the hut, they are fooled into thinking that he is the hermit, so well does he play the part.

As one would expect, Frost introduces an unusual treatment of the climax of the play, reminiscent of the old woman in Mother Goose who found herself so changed after her petticoats were cut off as she lay sleeping that she had to go home to ask her dog if she were herself or someone else. The murderer, dressed in the hermit's extra suit and speaking in imitation of his piping drawl, terrifies the old man by grabbing him and exclaiming:

* "I'm going to mix us up....and then see if even you can tell us apart. The way I propose to do is to take both your hands like this and then whirl round and round with you till we're both so dizzy we'll fall down when we let go. Don't you resist or holler. I ain't a-going to hurt ye-yet. Only I've got to get up some sort of excitement to make it easier for both of us. And then when we're down, I want you should wait till you can see straight before you speak and try to tell which is which and which is t'other. Wait some time."

They twirl, fall, wait, and then the murderer accuses the hermit of the crime, whereupon the poor old man faints in fear, is rapped on the head, and disposed of as related above.

"The Way Out" was produced at Northampton two years after its publication by "The Maskers" of Amherst College under Robert Frost's personal direction, and its

enthusiastic reception showed that Frost had not lost his ability to stage successful plays which he had demonstrated in the old Pinkerton days at Derry. Neither had his skill in the art of teaching waned, for he was immensely popular at Amherst as Professor of English from 1916 to 1920.

In 1921 Frost was lured away from Amherst by President Burton of the University of Michigan in order that he might accept a Fellowship in Creative Art. The idea of this fellowship was that Robert Frost should "lend" his presence to the campus at Ann Arbor for a year in order that the students might be inspired by having a real poet writing verse in their midst, and that those with literary aspirations be given helpful criticism and guidance by a successful author.

Here, as at Amherst, the poet enjoyed great popularity and was invited to so many social functions that he had very little time for creative writing. At one affair in particular there occurred an incident which is worth relating. Frost, hearing that his friend Amy Lowell was making a lecture tour of the mid-west, invited her to Ann Arbor to a faculty dinner and asked her to speak to the entire student body in the evening. Miss Lowell accepted gladly, and enjoyed every moment at the table.

After dinner she and her host went happily to the lecture hall with no premonition of what was in store for them. Just as Frost was about to introduce the guest speaker to the twenty-five hundred people who had come to hear her, he paused to turn on the reading lamp, blew out a fuse, and plunged the hall into Stygian darkness! As is usual in such catastrophes, the janitor had disappeared as though the earth had swallowed him, and since he could not be found for half an hour, there was nothing to do but sit and wait. In a very few moments the darkness was pierced by shafts of brilliancy, verbal shafts, for Frost and Miss Lowell engaged in such delightful repartee that the hall was indeed illuminated. The arrival of the janitor with a new fuse and the subsequent restoration of ordinary light filled the audience with regret; regret of a moment, however, for the next moment there were howls of laughter when Frost, in walking to the front of the stage to give Miss Lowell her belated introduction, tripped over the cord of the seemingly bewitched lamp, extinguishing it; then, as a grand finale, upset the whole pitcher of water which had been placed on the platform for the speaker's comfort!

To see a great poet undergo just such a series of mishaps as might occur to any ordinary person made

Robert Frost seem all the more human and lovable to the "Michiganders"; and when his time was up in June, he was urged to return the following year, though the Fellowship was supposed to exist for one year only. After a second year, he was still so popular that in 1925 he had a life-Fellowship offered him, one which had been founded just for him.

Pleased with this gracious compliment, Frost accepted, but he stayed only one year, for he was homesick for the hills north and west of Boston, and he was lonesome for his two children who lived back east. Returning to New England as headquarters, he spent a most interesting year from 1926 to 1927, teaching here, there, and everywhere-Wesleyan, Amherst, Michigan, and Dartmouth mostly-somewhat in the manner of the old circuit riders.

Although Mr. Frost has taught in many colleges since 1927, he has always returned like a homing pigeon to Amherst College; and in 1935 he bought a house in the town of Amherst-a modest, unostentatious dwelling, in spite of his name and fame. A very interesting question about picturesque Amherst is asked by a modern poet who lives there, David Morton, who says in a recent magazine article:

*"Is there any other town in America which can boast of so many poets whose work is read by their countrymen today? Emily Dickinson, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, Robert Francis, Robert Frost and others have made their

names known among poetry readers everywhere-and all of them, save only Emily Dickinson....are to be met on the streets of Amherst, buying their groceries, going to see their friends, chatting with acquaintances on the corner. One is tempted to mention impressive parallels: Athens in the fifth century B.C., with her congregation of poets, dramatists and philosophers; fifteenth century Florence with her company of great painters; Oxford in certain periods. The Brook Farm Colony....stands somewhat apart as a purposeful gathering of chosen spirits, whereas this coincidence of Amherst poets on this single acre came about quite by chance and was noticed as a fact only after its occurrence.

.....

Amherst, Massachusetts
(Home of Emily Dickinson, Robert
Frost.....and others)

This is their acre....here the bright word fell
Because of grasses bending in the sun,
Because of leaf-sound and the listening spell
Of woods in summer when the rain is done;
Here is the hill whose lonely grandeur made
A lonely music of their singing thought:
Some hard-won, wintry flower less quick to fade,
Of hardier sweetness than the summer wrought.

These are the signs that we shall know them by-
This meadow, speaking in their language, now,
This wood, this hill, this austere slope of sky....
And when you hear a birdcall from her bough,
Lonely and sweet, and all the dusk is stirred,
You will hear others rhyming with that bird."

Robert Frost has done his rhyming so successfully that he is the only poet who has been three times winner of the Pulitzer Prize, awarded to the outstanding American poet of each year, and he has also won several lesser prizes for different volumes of his verse. As to college degrees, they "droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon" this man who was scorned in his early teaching days because he had not one. Frost not only has a Litt. D. from

* Shakespeare: Merchant of Venice: Act IV, Scene 1

both of the colleges he attended as a young man without benefit of graduation-Dartmouth (1933) and Harvard (1937), but he has received the same honor from Yale and Middlebury (1924), Columbia (1932), and University of Pennsylvania (1936). He holds an A.M. from Amherst (1917), an M.A. from the University of Michigan (1922), and L.H.D.'s from University of Vermont (1923), Bowdoin (1926), Wesleyan (1931), and Bates (1936). Almost all of these degrees were awarded to Mr. Frost after he had taught or lectured or advised for a while at the different colleges and had shown in a "close-up" what manner of man he was. To know him in the greatness of his mind and heart, the simplicity of his outer life, the infinite capacities of his inner life, is not only to love him but to wish to give him the best one has to give; hence these degrees, by the greatness of their number and the importance of the institutions awarding them, are but a true indication of the greatness of the recipient and the love he inspires.

Just as Frost's poems have both local and universal significance, so were patterned two awards which came to the poet in 1922. His election to honorary membership in the P.E.N. Club placed his name beside those of Thomas Hardy, Selma Lagerlof, and other world celebrities, and shortly afterward he was chosen Poet Laureate of Vermont by the

State League of Women's Clubs; and who can say whether the international or the provincial honor pleased him more?

One of the special reasons why Vermont wished to honor him was because he had helped found the Bread Loaf School of English at Middlebury College two years before. In connection with his lecturing at Bread Loaf, it is interesting to note the originality of an illustration used to show the students the usual and the unusual ways of describing a very ordinary incident.

*"Too often, Frost thinks, it is written thus:
The cat comes into the room.
I put the cat out.
The cat comes in again.

Behold the transformation wrought by shifting the identical material into a dramatic vein:

'There's that cat again.
Get out, you cat!' -
'What's the use?' "

Some years after Vermont had honored him, Frost was elected Honorary President of the California Writers' Guild, a gracious gesture from his native state. In 1930 he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the next year was named National Honor Poet of Poetry Week by the General Federation of Women's Clubs.

Continental recognition has come, not only from England, which still regards the poet as a dear foster-son, but even from Italy and Germany, where the Dictators can evidently find nothing offensive to their delicate sensi-

bilities in Frost's poems. At the Sorbonne in France a study of the works of Robert Frost is on the required list for those who are preparing to teach English, while the University of Montpellier includes his writings in a list of readings for literature course along with such immortals as Shakespeare, Milton, and Thackeray.

A fairly recent honor brought Robert Frost back to the Harvard Campus as a teacher of note almost forty years from the time he had attended the college as a brilliant, though dissatisfied student. In 1936 he was made Charles Eliot Norton Professor of English at Harvard, and as such had, as one of his duties, to give six free public evening lectures for the lovers of good literature in Boston and its environs. The Norton lectures are always popular, as, indeed, are the many free opportunities to hear well-known people offered the general public by Harvard, but the Norton lectures of 1936 will go down as major events in the history of a college already rich in annals of renown.

The New Lecture Hall at the corner of Kirkland and Oxford Streets in Cambridge was filled to what seemed to be its capacity on the opening night of the series, but as the fame of the lectures spread, the size of the audience increased, until one could say literally on the third Wednesday evening that every available inch of the hall

was occupied.

Those in the know arrived by seven at the latest, in order to get good seats, but the wait of an hour seemed like ten minutes, so much was there to see. All kinds of people came streaming in through the two entrances--college professors and their families, of course, and students from the many institutions of learning in and about Boston, and many writers, too--they were expected--but along with them came the unexpected: bankers and clerks, housewives and business women, school teachers and school children, poor folk and wealthy socialites who sat right down on the floor in gorgeous velvet evening wraps and shiny black tails, when no seats were available. Rich and poor, famous and unknown, everyone talked to everyone else; all seemed like one big happy family, drawn together by a common bond of love for this gentle man who was to speak to them.

Until eight the hall was a hive of action, the fortunate folk in seats talking, reading, and watching the less fortunate late-comers as they tried to make themselves comfortable on the window sills, on the floor, in the aisles, on every stair leading to the platform and around its edge, and finally all over the flat surface of the platform itself, clear to the back wall. Just as the clock on the neighboring Sanders Theatre would begin to strike eight, there would come a silence, and with the

bells still chiming through the open door behind him, Robert Frost would enter, with Bernard DeVoto to clear a path for him through the massed humanity up to the platform. As the poet walked along this path, he would be given an ovation which few ~~men~~ in public life have been privileged to receive. Not only was there a clamorous clapping, but a wave of welcome that was all but tangible would go out to meet him, so filled with admiration and appreciation were the hearts of the audience!

In a Machine Age filled with cheap popularity and blatant vulgarity it was sweet to the soul to see honor and homage given where honor and homage were due; to hear an ovation raised to a man whose whole life had been patterned on the eternal ideals of Faith, Hope, and Charity, on Goodness and Simplicity, on Devotion to Family and Appreciation of the Commonplace, just as had his Maker's.

*"Frost is not only a beautiful poet. He is a beautiful person."

This quotation, attributed to Waldo Frank, expresses as well as any what was in the hearts of all the fortunate folk who were privileged to hear the Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard University in the spring of 1936.

CHAPTER SIX

HOAR - FROST



HARVARD UNIVERSITY, which dispensed the fruits of knowledge to Frost as a youth of 20, only to drink from his fount of wisdom as a poet of 60,

CHAPTER SIX

HOAR-FROST

What did a Poet find to say to the People about Poetry? What did a man who celebrated his sixty-first birthday during the course of lectures tell an expectant audience about his philosophy of life?

Robert Frost chose the following subjects for his Charles Eliot Norton lectures on Poetry:

March 4	The Old Way to be New
March 11	Vocal Imagination the Merger of Form and Content
March 18	Does Wisdom Signify?
March 25	Poetry as Prowess (Feat of Words)
April 8	Before the Beginning of a Poem
April 15	After the End of a Poem

Anyone who has read Frost's prose introductions to books written by friends will remember of seeing some of these topics discussed in those pages; anyone who has heard him lecture, of hearing them talked about in the easy, pleasant Frost manner. The poet has very definite ideas about poetry and imparts them to all his audiences, but he rambles along in such a delightful way and is so sincere in what he is saying that it is never boring to hear the same notion several times-in fact, it hardly seems the same, for he has the ingenuity to dress it up differently each time he puts it on parade. Frost is a born speaker; his flow of words unending; his audience-contact inspiring.

He is often timid , nevertheless, of addressing a large audience; and at the first Norton lecture he apologized for what he was **about** to say, because he was a poet, not a lecturer, and added in a rather nervous fashion , " I will enjoy the next lecture more than this." He forgot his nervousness, however, in telling us the new way and the old way to be new.

*"It may come to the notice of posterity (and then again it may not, that this, our age, ran wild in the quest of new ways to be new. The one old way to be new no longer served. Science put **it** into our heads that there must be new ways to be new. Those tried were largely by subtraction--elimination. Poetry, for example, was tried without punctuation. It was tried without capital letters. It was tried without metric frame **on which to measure** the rhythm. It was tried without any **images** but those to the eye; and a loud, general intoning had to be kept up to cover the total loss of specific images to the ear, those dramatic tones of voice which had hitherto constituted the better half of poetry. It was tried without phrase, epigram, coherence, logic, and consistency. It was tried without ability....It was tried premature like the delicacy of unborn calf in Asia. It was tried without feeling or sentiment like murder for small pay in the underworld. These many things was it tried without."

Frost deplored all these attempts to be deliberately original, and suggested, in his humorous way, that those who try to make the physical set-up of the poem "different" go a step farther and drop the first letter of every word the way the Cockneys drop their H's. He showed that those who seek any new way to be new miss the main objective of writing-the satisfaction of a great longing, a deep urge, and related his own experience at fifteen.

* Exact quotation from Introduction to King Jasper, a Poem by Edwin Arlington Robinson

The old way to be new is to write from inspiration, born in the heart and acted upon by a mind filled with a composite of all the good literature ever known, to an invisible audience made up of all the decent people one has ever known. All really good literature comes about in this way.

"When anyone tells you he's glad he heard you read your poems because now he knows how they should sound, he robs you of your art. You thought you wrote them that way."

Thus spoke the poet at the beginning of his second lecture in which he showed that dramatic tones were the merger between form and content.

"Concrete tones of voice are as old as Chaucer. Back of that we have the so-called dead languages, the ones where we don't know the tones of voice, so we scan them, since there is no refuge of knowing the right tones. How do we get our tones? They live in our throats, just as birds' notes live in their throats. We have certain tones for different occasions, as, for example, the tones in which squabbling children say,

'You do, too!'

'I don't either!'

'Do!'

'Don't!'

'Don't speak to me that way!'

It's not so much what you say as the way you say it, and yet you can't get anyone arrested for a tone of voice!"

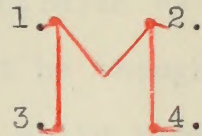
Mr. Frost confessed that when he was teaching, he fled from correcting daily themes because he missed the tones which say so much more than written words say. He "reminisced" about Ezra Pound and the Imagist Group in London-how they did not care for images of sound-just of sight. Both are necessary to give meaning to a poem, according to Mr. Frost, and he gave a sort of recipe for

putting a poem together by using the following ingredients:

1 big M for Meaning; 2 peaks of concrete imagery; 2 bases of insight and metaphor

Pictured, it would look like this:

1. Concrete Image of sound
2. Concrete image of sight
3. Metaphor
4. Insight



"To tell where form leaves off and material begins is difficult, but your interest while you are writing is in the material, and when you are done, you boast of the form. While you are putting your material into verse form, the material is in-and the form out-side, but when you are done the material is outside and the form inside."

Though Mr. Frost's third lecture was supposed to be about Wisdom, it started as an amplification of his second lecture on dramatic tones, at once material and form, for that is his "pet" subject.

"Listen for all kinds of dramatic tones. Scoop them up with your ears. When a person is 'going well', he commands many tones of voice that really make a paragraph or a poem. In good writing sentences talk to each other in expressive tones as though they were two or three characters in a play.

"Think of the dramatic tones in the oaths we exclaim with O! The research boys once set out to count them, but there were too many to enumerate. Here are a few: O, a big round letter, long in quantity, a mere mechanical sound; the O of grandeur-O King! O World! O Life! O Time!; the O of dismissal-O, just another kind of outdoor game; the O of somebody all worked up; the querulous O; the O of acceptance(something I never thought of before); the O of exclamation, when you bump into somebody; and lastly, the lengthy Ooooo of pain. It is possible to bring any one of these O's into poetry, although it is usually the O of beauty that finds its way into verse; and the raptures into which some poets have gone with their O's of beauty are the reasons why people tap their heads when they speak of poets."

Of great interest to teachers of reading was the

next idea of sound brought up by Mr. Frost-that the printed page is full of sounds that the eye-reader gets along without. He told of a test given to school children by a superintendent friend of his, and he told what he thought of it!

"The children were given one good solid page of reading, with the ideas all counted. They were timed to see how quickly they finished, and the time was divided by the number of ideas they got. The page was thicker for some than for others with ideas. The younger children skimmed along with no associations to delay them, while the poetry-readers, the children who heard the tones, the rhythm, the sounds on the page, were very much delayed in their downward journey and were called the worst readers. (An expression of disgust and a sort of snort!) I'd give NOTHING for eye-reading!"

In order to transfer from sound to wisdom, about which he was supposed to be talking that evening, Mr. Frost went from the mechanics of reading to the materials for reading, saying:

"Some book reviewers and book purchasers don't care how unsound a book may be, if it only has sound. I confess that nothing makes me shut a book any quicker than monotony of sound-no up or down or roundabout! It is deplorable, nevertheless, that some writers make a profession of writing just sounds, of writing without thought, with no wisdom. I'd rather be a wise man than an artist or a philosopher.

"Some think that if a man is practical, he cannot be a poet; that a poet must be an idealist. God can count on me never to be disappointed in Him, for I am not an idealist"

When Mr. Frost went on to say that there was a time that Virtue was One, and the poet both a wise man and a good man, the audience felt that history had repeated itself as far as the speaker was concerned. He next asked if a man must be sound to be an artist, and answered his own question

by citing several whose wisdom was questionable, but who were unquestionably artists.

"Shelley never knew what he was up to, and of course a wise man should. What does Yeats think? Does anyone bother to know? Yet, Mr. Yeats has a hearty dislike for the middle classes, and is that wisdom? Had Poe a wisdom or philosophy? His writings were very shallow, with nothing to live by. Is Art which is unsocial wicked? Should all poetry from now on be good for the state? The artistic people call for Art for Art's sake; the radicals for art that is good for the state and family. Which is right? Because a thing is good, is it beautiful? Think of the gamut of beauty, going from beautiful beauty down to grotesque beauty, thence to vile beauty. I can lend myself to the whole range in poetry.

"What about using poetry as a vehicle of grievances against the un-Utopian state? There are those who live in grievances, and those who live in griefs. A distinction must be made between the two. Grievances are a form of impatience; griefs a form of patience. Grievances should be restricted to prose, leaving poetry to go its way in tears.

"'Waste Lands' by our T.S. Eliot is loaded with grievances, but Eliot's later attitude is one of grief and human sadness.

"Too many people in this country have political grievances. Listen to my definition of politics. Politics is an honest attempt to misunderstand one another. I have a friend who had two colds and got so tired of being sick that she said she was tired of her own constitution and had a good mind to get rid of it! Folks with grievances say, 'Where's something to throw a chair at?' and then they find fault with the Constitution.

"Either pessimism or optimism should go deep. Deep is wise. Who's deep in America? What can a great nation like America afford in its greatness?"

With all these questions and many more did the poet confound the people in his third lecture, the title of which even was a question: "Does Wisdom Signify"? One gathered that while wisdom was not an absolute necessity, "unwisdom" was very irritating, and that a time might come when an artist must stand or fall, according to his wisdom or lack of it.

The fourth lecture, "Poetry as Prowess", took us right onto the college campus, any campus of any college, to see what, around college, was most congenial to a young artist from 17 to 25-for it was between the ages of 15 and 25 that nearly everyone who had written a good poem "struck his note".

"What shall we do with these young artists in college? Shall we keep them and mark them? Shall we let them loose, or shall we put them out? Who can help genius? There should be a good literary magazines edited on each college campus, but there are not. All kinds of opportunities are given for prowess in football and sports, but none for poetry as performance; no stadia where poetic victories are celebrated. Poetry, nevertheless, demands the same rigorous training that sports do. You should go in for poetry only if you can comport yourself in and through it with close form. Just as the athlete keeps his record and tries to beat it, so, in literature, you have a record for comparison, and the contest goes on forever in a trial of skill and courage, with unity, coherence, and emphasis as the running gag-men. While there should be a central thought-concatination with each part a link in the chain, still, poetry should not be too straight-ahead. Step-by-step surprises and a discovery at the end-surprising the writer as well as the reader-make for a far more noteworthy performance. There should be a general main direction, for direction is a great thing, but the branches should ramify, so that at the end there is a network, all closely related. Performance is conformance.

"A poem is an expedition, an adventure in expediency. What I like about it is its irrevocability-what's taken shape in it and can't be changed. Like a game, it cannot be won or lost again. Like a game, it can be talked over, but not played over. Again, performance is conformance."

The next-to-last lecture, "Before the Beginning of a Poem", naturally summed up the requisites of the performance.

"Where is the rise of a poem? In the emotions, of course, and those poems are best which are made in the first flow

of emotion. The rise is in the emotion; the outlet in a stream of emotional logic which must be made to flow over stones of old thoughts-and one's own thoughts-to make poetry-pure, poetry done the right way. What is poetry pure? There are those critics who confuse pure poetry with form-without-content, which is amusing, for how can you make a whole poem with nothing in it? It would be like a vase with a hole in the bottom. There must be content along with form, and there must be method-in fact, method is everything. The "subject" poet will be a second-rater for life. He should write from an emotion, based on his own experiences, either outer or inner.

"What equipment should a poet have? The traits that go with poetry are a ready wit-you've got to keep your wits about you in a poem, if anywhere; a susceptibility to words-but you must stick to sense, for if you have a weakness for words, you get mixed up; a disposition to metaphor-for only by good comparisons do you make yourself felt; rhythm-both rigid and varied, for, by 'the fruitful marriage' of these two, poetry is made; a scientific viewpoint-for poetry thinks; and a 'spot' for things to go to-images directed at the eye, the ear, and the other senses.

"Very young poets are apt to write stentorian poetry, like a steam whistle. This energy should be harnessed, like a waterfall, for poetry must feel its way out to thought.

*"A poem begins with a lump in the throat; a homesickness or a love-sickness. It is a reaching-out expression; an effort to find fulfilment. A complete poem is one where the emotion has found its thought and the thought has found the words." *

The sixth and last lecture was held in Sanders Theatre, because the lecture hall was not large enough to hold all those who wished to attend; and long before eight o'clock the doors had to be locked against hordes of people, for there was no room to squeeze even one more listener into the place. The title of the lecture was, appropriately enough, "After The End of a Poem".

"When a poem is delivered over, whose is it?

What can be done with a poem?"

Frost once set his students at Amherst at work on this question and they found one hundred eight things you could do to a poem besides read and write it.

"Can it be printed? Yes, if it CAN. Can it be illuminated? Yes, if it can be done without violating the poem. To whom shall it be delivered? It belongs, first of all, to the good reader, NOT the rapid eye-reader, but the one who will luxuriate through slow sounding-go through the poem 'on his ear'. Secondly, it belongs to the Levites, the keepers of the texts, and thirdly, to the expounders of the texts, that they may proclaim its wisdom and its connection with life. The poets give these expounders the laugh when they get more out of the poetry than the writer has put into it. Finally, it is delivered over to the poetry testers, to an application by analogy, 'trial by jury'. They care for the separateness of the parts of the work of art as well as the connectiveness.

"The amplification of one experience is not enough. The smallest poem is made up of two or three lumps from different days in different situations, but the emotion which has started the expression has made the different things seem together by right of eminent domain-the very force of the emotion. The test of its togetherness is to get a line that seems as if it were in italics.

"The world is old and words are worn, but there is a renewal of words in the way they are pushed into metaphors by the emotion. The poet must 'emove' words in order to 'emove' the reader. Ultimately every poem should have its own thought and its own sound, united in the white moment of its making.

* "Imagery and after-imagery are about all there is to poetry. Synecdoche and synecdoche-My motto is that something has to be left to God."*

Thus a Poet to the People, giving freely of the ripe wisdom gleaned from rich experience. Robert Frost gave freely of himself, too, remaining after every lecture to autograph books and to answer questions which anyone

wished to ask, in spite of the fact that he did not seem to be in the best of health. Bernard DeVoto would hover about solicitously, never intruding, however, and when he thought that Mr. Frost was showing signs of exhaustion, he would quietly remove the poet from the last few admirers who were loath to have him go.

Besides giving freely of his wisdom and of himself, Mr. Frost recited his poetry in an inimitable fashion every Wednesday evening, to the great delight of the audience. It was, of course, a splendid demonstration of the dramatic tones of voice which he incorporates in all his work, and kept the listeners spellbound. While he read many of his older poems because folks in the audience requested favorites, he preferred to read newer poems from the as-yet unpublished manuscript of A Further Range which he brought with him each night. Not only did the listeners enjoy the readings, but Mr. Frost himself had a delightful time reciting his own verse. He made it seem as fresh as though it were being composed at the moment of delivery. A few, which seemed to be his favorites, he repeated each week, and those will be mentioned in the following chapter which treats of his poetical work, called Rime!

C H A P T E R S E V E N

" R I M E "



"The only fault I find with old New Hampshire
Is that her mountains aren't quite high enough."

CHAPTER SEVEN

" R I M E "

Before a rime IS, there must of necessity be a rimer; where rimers are, there must of necessity be a poet in their midst. Of rimers there are many; of poets few. What makes a man a poet, and not merely a rimer? What is that which he writes that goes by the name of Poetry?

Goethe said, many years ago:

* "A lively feeling of situations and an aptitude to describe them makes the poet....The poetry of a true, real, natural vision of life demands descriptive powers of the highest degree, rendering a poet's pictures so lifelike that they become actualities to every reader.... At bottom no subject is unpoetical, if only the poet knows how to treat it aright."

According to no less an authority than Goethe, then, Robert Frost is a poet, for he possesses in a marked degree a feeling for situations and an aptitude to describe them; and certainly no poet exists whose pictures seem any more actual to the reader than Frost's; but since Goethe, however ageless his wisdom, lived and wrote more than a hundred years ago, it is incumbent that we come down through the years to see the way a modern "poetry-tester" defines a poet. In an age of feminine influence it is but fitting that we hear the woman's viewpoint, and, since no better choice can be made than Marguerite Wilkinson,

poet and critic, give ear to her very simple, yet satisfactory explanation of the difference between a poet and a rimer.

* "Poetry is the sharing of life, the sharing of any of life's strong, rich, vivid, or lovely experiences, in patterns of musical words. Poetry can help us to share many experiences through which we ourselves have never lived. It can also help us to think and feel in new ways about experiences through which we have lived.....

"This is true because poetry is made by poets, by people who brood over their thoughts long and lovingly, who feel life more keenly than others feel it, and who have, moreover, the power to express their thoughts and feelings. People who are deficient in thought and feeling can never make poems, no matter how clever they may be with rhyme and meter. (They may be able to make good verse, but that is not the same thing.) On the other hand, people who are not fine craftsmen cannot make poems either, no matter how deeply they think and feel, for poetry is not crude feeling, not mere mental hygiene. Both emotion and craftsmanship are necessary in making poetry. Emotion is the raw material and craftsmanship gives it the pattern of musical words in which it is to live. Poems may be made out of anything....but the thought must have been passionately and sensitively felt; the pattern must have been well made; the musical words must have been put together in a way that gives them individuality."

According to the standards of our own times, Frost is again adjudged a poet, for he thinks passionately and feels sensitively; is as pertinacious about his pattern as his "Pertinax" suggests:

+ "Let chaos storm!
Let cloud shapes swarm!
I wait for form.";

puts his musical words together in so original a manner that for years they were refused by publishers because of their individuality.

* M. Wilkinson: The Poetry of Our Own Times pp.9 & 10

+ A Further Range

Robert Frost, then, both by old and by new definition, is a poet, but what kind of a poet? In this age of intense classification, what isms are represented in his works? The answers are: that he is many kinds of a poet; that one has but to seek, and he shall find, examples of almost any classifications made in poetry. "The mischief" lies in trying to decide which, in a multitude of shining examples, is most Frost-like.

In A Further Range the poet tells of an experience he had when he was:

Lost In Heaven

The clouds, the source of rain, one stormy night
Offered an opening to the source of dew;
Which I accepted with impatient sight,
Looking for my old skymarks in the blue.

But stars were scarce in that part of the sky,
And no two were of the same constellation-
No one was bright enough to identify;
So 'twas with not ungrateful consternation,

Seeing myself well lost once more, I sighed,
"Where, where in Heaven am I? But don't tell me!"
I warned the clouds, "by opening on me wide."
Let's let my heavenly lostness overwhelm me."

The person who is lost amid the vastness of Frost's literary gems, and must emerge with only one sample of each kind, finds them all of such uniform excellence that he is indeed overwhelmed with a heavenly lostness. But since the poet himself says that:

* "All that an artist needs is samples. Enough success to

* E.S. Sergeant: Fire Under The Andes p.288

know what money is like; enough love to know what women are like."—

it may be that enough poems to know what Frost is like will suffice the reader; though it should lead to a desire to become acquainted with all of his verse.

As the first sample, it might be well to take "Mending Wall", perhaps the most frequently quoted of all Frost's poems, and certainly the most often misquoted. When the poet's name is mentioned, people will invariably say, "Oh, that's the man who says, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'" As a matter of fact, these five anti-social words are always uttered by Frost's neighbor in the poem, and never by Frost. His point of view in "Mending Wall" is that of the Humanist, for his lines read:

* WHY do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offence.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down. I could say 'Elves' to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'

When some critics asked Mr. Frost where he, a New Englander, got his elves in the poem, he explained, with his ready wit, that they must have come from living with

* North of Boston

the Irish in Lawrence.

A few lines down from the elves is a savage about whom Mr. Frost is very particular. He must have his hyphen; he must always be old-stone and never old stone, for that is not paleolithic!

Since "Mending Wall" is too long to quote in full, a complete poem showing Frost as a Humanist; showing, also, the use he makes of a stone wall is:

A Time To Talk

When a friend calls to me from the road
And slows his horse to a meaning walk,
I don't stand still and look around
On all the hills I haven't hoed,
And shout from where I am, 'What is it?'
No, not as there is time to talk.
I thrust my hoe in the mellow ground,
Blade-end up and five feet tall,
And plod; I go up to the stone wall
For a friendly visit.

The next poem to this in Mountain Interval is one of Frost's funniest, "The Cow In Apple Time", describing the evil effect of cider syrup on the bovine lady's morals. He himself is very fond of a much later poem, which he wrote "for the Ned of it", and which is especially good to use in a chapter on isms, for it is a clever satire on modern efficiency. It has two names: "Departmental" or "The End of My Ant Jerry".*

An ant on the table cloth
Ran into a dormant moth
Of many times his size.

He showed not the least surprise.
 His business wasn't with such.
 He gave it scarcely a touch,
 And was off on his duty run.
 Yet if he encountered one
 Of the hive's enquiry squad
 Whose work is to find out God
 And the nature of time and space,
 He would put him onto the case.
 Ants are a curious race;
 One crossing with hurried tread
 The body of one of their dead
 Isn't given a moment's arrest-
 Seems not even impressed.
 But he no doubt reports to any
 With whom he crosses antennae,
 And they no doubt report
 To the higher up at court.
 Then word goes forth in Formic:
 "Death's come to Jerry McCormic,
 Our selfless forager Jerry.
 Will the special Janizary
 Whose office it is to bury
 The dead of the commissary
 Go bring him home to his people.
 Lay him in state on a sepal.
 Wrap him for shroud in a petal.
 Embalm him with ichor of nettle.
 This is the word of your Queen."
 And presently on the scene
 Appears a solemn mortician;
 And taking formal position
 With feelers calmly atwiddle,
 Seizes the dead by the middle,
 And heaving him high in air,
 Carries him out of there.
 No one stands round to stare.
 It is nobody else's affair.

It couldn't be called ungentle.
 But how thoroughly departmental.

This clever verse shows Frost, of course, as a
Humorist, and he has great fun reading it aloud, but even
 more does he enjoy reciting this favorite, which shows him
 as a Philosopher:

* Two Tramps in Mud Time

Out of the mud two strangers came
And caught me splitting wood in the yard.
And one of them put me off my aim
By hailing cheerily "Hit them hard!"
I knew pretty well why he dropped behind
And let the other go on a way.
I knew pretty well what he had in mind:
He wanted to take my job for pay.

Good blocks of beech it was I split,
As large around as the chopping block;
And every piece I squarely hit
Fell splinterless as a cloven rock.
The blows that a life of self-control
Spares to strike for the common good
That day, giving a loose to my soul,
I spent on the unimportant wood.

The sun was warm but the wind was chill.
You know how it is with an April day
When the sun is out and the wind is still,
You're one month on in the middle of May.
But if you so much as dare to speak,
A cloud comes over the sunlit arch,
A wind comes off a frozen peak,
And you're two months back in the middle
of March.

A bluebird comes tenderly up to alight
And fronts the wind to unruffle a plume,
His song so pitched as not to excite
A single flower as yet to bloom.
It is snowing a flake: and he half knew
Winter was only playing possum.
Except in color he isn't blue,
But he wouldn't advise a thing to blossom.

The water for which we may have to look
In summertime with a witching-wand,
In every wheelrut's now a brook,
In every print of a hoof a pond.
Be glad of water, but don't forget
The lurking frost in the earth beneath
That will steal forth after the sun is set
And show on the water its crystal teeth.

* Two "songs" in this time

Out of the wood two sparrows came
And caught me splitting wood in the yard.
And one of them sat on my arm
By holding cheerfully its feet hard!
I knew pretty well why he stopped behind
And let the other go on a way.
I knew pretty well what he had in mind:
He wanted to take my job for day.

Good blocks of beech it was I split,
As I stood on the wooden block;
And every piece I saw was lit
Well with the sun's warm light.
The piece that a life of self-control
Spares to suffer for the common good
That day, giving a piece to my soul,
I spent on the unimportant wood.

The sun was warm but the wind was chill.
You know how it is with an April day.
When the sun is out and the wind is still,
You're one month on in the middle of May.
But if you go north on a cold day,
A cloud comes over the sunlit arch,
A wind comes off a frozen sea,
And you're two months back in the middle
of March.

A blizzard comes suddenly up to night
And frosts the wind to unrelenting rains.
His sun so often as not to waste
A single flower as yet to bloom.
It is snowing & blizzards; and he has to wait
Winter was only playing possum.
Though in color he isn't blue,
But he wouldn't advise a thing to blossom.

The water for which we have to look
In streams with a shining wind,
In every whistling now a brook,
In every point of a boat's nose,
To find of water, but don't forget
The hidden fact in the earth beneath
That will stand forth after the sun is set
And you on the water's crystal teeth.

The time when most I loved my task
 These two must make me love it more
 By coming with what they came to ask.
 You'd think I never had felt before
 The weight of an ax-head poised aloft,
 The grip of earth on outspread feet,
 The life of muscles rocking soft
 And smooth and moist in vernal heat.

Out of the woods two hulking tramps
 (From sleeping God knows where last night,
 But not long since in the lumber camps).
 They thought all chopping was theirs of right.
 Men of the woods and lumberjacks,
 They judged me by their appropriate tool.
 Except as a fellow handled an ax,
 They had no way of knowing a fool.

Nothing on either side was said.
 They knew they had but to stay their stay
 And all their logic would fill my head:
 As that I had no right to play
 With what was another man's work for gain.
 My right might be love but theirs was need.
 And where the two exist in twain
 Theirs was the better right-agreed.

But yield who will to their separation,
 My object in living is to unite
 My avocation and my vocation
 As my two eyes make one in sight.
 Only where love and need are one,
 And the work is play for mortal stakes,
 Is the deed ever really done
 For heaven and the future's sakes.

This poem, which is certainly one of Frost's best, shows him in two other roles: as a Naturalist and a Realist. Once a "native" has read the vivid description of the change in weather of an April day in these parts, he never forgets it, for he has experienced the same thing every Spring, but has lacked the power to express it so perfectly. To those of us who "April" in New England, the bluebird

The time when most I loved my task
These two must make me love it more
My coming with what they came to see
You'd think I never had left before
The weight of an on-ward-pointed effort
The grip of earth on outspread feet
The life of unnumbered working men
And women and child in various need

Out of the woods two halving tramps
(From sleeping God knows where last night)
But not long since in the lumber camp
They thumped all chopping was theirs of right
Men of the woods and lumberjacks
They judged me by their own standards too
Except as a fellow hauled an ax
They had no way of knowing a fool

Nothing on either side was said
They knew they had to stay their way
And all their logic would fill my head
As that I had no right to stay
With what was another man's work for gain
My right might be love but theirs was need
And where the two mixed in brain
There was the better right-angled

But yield who will to their separation
My subject in fiction is to unite
My avocation and my vocation
As my two eyes were one in sight
Only where love and need are one
And the work is play for mortal stakes
Is the deed ever really done
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shows him in two other roles: as a Naturalist and a Realist.
Once a "native" has read the vivid description of the
change in weather of an April day in these parts, he never
forgets it, for he has experienced the same thing every
Spring, but has lacked the power to express it so perfectly.
To those of us who "April" in New England, the blushing

unruffling a plume, the last spit of snow falling, the sudden appearance of lakes and ponds in our own yards, and the hint of frost in the air, in spite of the sun's heat, are all the most natural of phenomena, which we talk about in the usual way; but Frost writes about them in his unusual manner.

Russell Blankenship has made some very discerning comments on Frost as a realist:

* "By a numerical computation of his lines, it is probable that Frost will be found to be nine-tenths pure realist.

"His habit of resting his poetic interpretations upon a realistic basis is one of his most agreeable and characteristic traits.....

"To say that Frost is a realist is not to warn the reader against the 'unpleasant' in his lines. The poet is reported to have said that there are two kinds of realists, the one who gives you the potato with much dirt clinging to it to prove that it is a potato, and the one who gives you the potato washed clean. Emphatically Frost belongs to the latter class of realists.....

"In a matter-of-fact fashion...he tells of the commonplace happenings of country life. He talks interestedly about mending wall, cleaning out the pasture spring, apple picking, wood chopping, and all the daily tasks of the New England farm, and in every reference and every syllable he gives evidence that he knows intimately what he is talking about."

So real are Frost's descriptions that there is a story told of one Vermonter[†] "who said with a whimsical smile, 'I can't read those; they're so true, they hurt.'"

One poem, so lovely that it hurts, shows Frost as

* R. Blankenship: American Literature pp. 588 & 589
[†] Asa Don Dickinson: The Best Books of Our Time p.109

a Lover back in the Derry days, when he would often be gone all day long on a botanizing trip. It must have touched Mrs. Frost deeply to have her husband write these beautiful lines to her:

* Flower-Gathering

I left you in the morning,
And in the morning glow
You walked a way beside me
To make me sad to go.
Do you know me in the gloaming,
Gaunt and dusty grey with roaming?
Are you dumb because you know me
not
Or dumb because you know?
All for me? And not a question
For the faded flowers gay
That could take me from beside
you
For the ages of a day?
They are yours, and be the measure
Of their worth for you to treasure,
The measure of the little while
That I've been long away.

Robert Frost must certainly be written down as a Lyricist, for he has written some of the loveliest lyrics in the English language. One which is dearly loved by children is:

Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening

Whose woods these are I think I know,
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

* A Boy's Will

...a lover back in the Jerry days, when he would often be gone
all day long on a pottering trip. It must have touched Mrs.
Trotter deeply to leave her husband with these beautiful
lines to her:

* Flower-Gathering

I left you in the morning,
And in the morning glow
You waited a way beside me
To wait me and to go.
Do you know me in the glowing
Gentle and happy gray with morning?
Are you and I the same? You know me
Not
Of course you know?
All for me? And not a question
For the faded flower?
That could take me from beside
You
For the sake of a day?
They are yours, and so the measure
Of little worth for you to measure.
The measure of the little white
That I've seen long away.

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Whose woods these are I think I know,
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.
My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
 To ask if there is some mistake.
 The only other sound's the sweep
 Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
 But I have promises to keep,
 And miles to go before I sleep,
 And miles to go before I sleep.

Even a child may glimpse the steadfastness of character revealed in the keeping of promises, where an adult will perceive the thought of the many duties to be done in life before the eternal sleep. Both will be charmed by the beauty of the picture and the music of the words.

This scene is, of course, from New Hampshire, as is another which Frost often reads for the children in an audience, and which shows him as Vocalist:

The Runaway

Once, when the snow of the year was beginning to fall,
 We stopped by a mountain pasture to say, "Whose colt?"
 A little Morgan had one forefoot on the wall,
 The other curled at his breast. He dipped his head
 And snorted at us. And then he had to bolt.
 We heard the miniature thunder where he fled,
 And we saw him, or thought we saw him, dim and grey;
 Like a shadow against the curtain of falling flakes.
 "I think the little fellow's afraid of the snow.
 He isn't winter-broken. It isn't play
 With the little fellow at all. He's running away.
 I doubt if even his mother could tell him, 'Sakes,
 It's only weather.' He'd think she didn't know!
 Where is his mother? He can't be out alone."
 And now he comes again with clatter of stone,
 And mounts the wall again with whited eyes
 And all his tail that isn't hair up straight.
 He shudders his coat as if to throw off flies.
 "Whoever it is who leaves him out so late,

When other creatures have gone to stall and bin,
Ought to be told to come and take him in."

When Robert Frost read this for the grown-up children at Harvard, he said,

* "I know what I want to do most. I don't do it often enough. In 'The Runaway' I added the moral at the end just for the pleasure of the aggrieved tone of voice."

Dramatic tones, at once material and form! Tied up with Frost as Vocalist is Frost as Dramatist, and while all of his poems are dramatic, "The Death of the Hired Man" is practically a play, with its moving dialogue between husband and wife as they discuss the poor old farm hand who has come back to them to die instead of taking refuge with his own kin.

† "Warren," she said, 'he has come home to die:
You needn't be afraid he'll leave you this time.'

'Home,' he mocked gently.

'Yes, what else but home?
It all depends on what you mean by home.
Of course he's nothing to us, any more
Than was the hound that came a stranger to us
Out of the woods, worn out upon the trail.'

'Home is the place where, when you have to go there,
They have to take you in.'

'I should have called it
Something you somehow haven't to deserve.'

These two definitions are even now, in Frost's lifetime, familiar sayings; and it is very probable in years to come that many passages from Frost will be memorized by school children as those from Shakespeare have been for

* Exact quotation from Sergeant: Fire Under The Andes pp.301-2

† North of Boston

When other creatures have gone to sleep and him
Ought to be told to come and take him in."

Then Robert Frost read this for the grown-up child-

born at Harvard, he said,

"I know what I want to do most. I don't do it often
enough. In 'The Runaway' I added the moral at the end and just
for the pleasure of the aggrieved tone of voice."

Dramatic form, at once material and formal; tied up

with Frost as Verbalist is Frost as Dramatist, and while all

of his poems are dramatic, "The Death of the Bird Man" is

essentially a play, with the moving dialogue between him-

self and wife as they discuss the poor old farm hand who

has come back to them to the instead of taking refuge with

his own kind.

"Listen," she said, "he has come home to die;
You needn't be afraid he'll leave you this time."

"Home," he mocked gently.

"Yes, what else but home?"

It all depends on what you mean by home.

Of course he's nothing to me, any more

than was the housewife who came a stranger to us

out of the woods, worn out upon the trail."

"Home is the place where, when you have to go there,

They have to take you in."

"I should have called it

Something you somehow haven't to deserve."

These two dialogues are even now, in Frost's file-

time, Verbalist again; and it is very probable in years

to come that many passages from Frost will be recognized by

school children as those from Shakespeare have been for

Exact quotation from Verbalist: The Runaway, pp. 101-2

Death of the Bird Man

many decades because of their timelessness and universal application.

Since "The Death of the Hired Man" is in dialogue form, it is a perfect illustration of Frost as Dialoguist, while another poem in the same volume, "A Servant to Servants", might classify him as a Fatalist, or at least one who depicts the morbid and depressing scenes of life. Many critics speak of the sombre tones of Robert Frost's work, and even Amy Lowell, as well as she knew the poet, spoke of North of Boston as "the epitome of decaying New England." It is to Miss Lowell that Frost refers in his poem "New Hampshire" when he says:

" Another Massachusetts poet said,
'I go no more to summer in New Hampshire.
I've given up my summer place in Dublin.'
But when I asked to know what ailed New Hampshire,
She said she couldn't stand the people in it,

.....
And when I asked to know what ailed the people,
She said, 'Go read your own books and find out.'"

It must be that when Amy Lowell found Frost's people queer and other critics thought his work sombre they had previously made up their minds and nothing could change them, for really careful study of Frost shows no such faults.

Frost defines himself as a poet in "New Hampshire" with these words:

"I may as well confess myself the author
Of several books against the world in general."

many decades because of their clearness and universal application.

Since the death of the great man in dialogue form, it is a perfect illustration of Frost as a dramatist. While another poem in the same volume, "A Servant to Servants," might classify him as a dramatist, or at least one who depicts the morbid and depressing scenes of life. Many critics speak of the somber tones of Robert Frost's work, and even Amy Lowell, as well as she knew the poet, spoke of North of Boston as "the epitome of decaying New England." It is to Miss Lowell that Frost refers in his poem "New Hampshire" when he says:

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"I may as well confess myself the author
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Anyone who has read Robert Frost understandingly knows that this statement of Frost's is NOT to be taken literally; that the poet meant that he writes against a background of the world in general. It is because of this fact that he is often called a Symbolist. Although his poems are mostly tales of New Hampshire happenings and make him appear a Localist, there is always a universal overthought to the simple idea. As Frost continues:

"To take them as against a special state
Or even nation's to restrict my meaning.
I'm what is called a sensiblist,
Or otherwise an environmentalist."

Who should know better than a man himself what he is?

At another time Frost defined himself in this way:

* "If I must be classified as a poet, I might be called a Synecdochist; for I prefer the synecdoche in poetry-that figure of speech in which we use the part for the whole."

Louis Untermeyer has coined a name of his own for Mr. Frost, as the following article will show:

† "With each new book Robert Frost continues to establish himself as the most rewarding and likewise the most richly integrated poet of his generation. He has no contemporary rival in America, and only William Butler Yeats can challenge his pre-eminence as the most distinguished poet writing in English today. A Further Range, the sixth of his interrelated and yet varied volumes, solidifies his position.

"By what name that position will finally be known will be determined by historians more detached than the present appraisers. Erudite and sometimes persuasive theses have been written proving Mr. Frost to be (a) a classicist, (B) a symbolist, (c) a humanist, (d) a synecdochist....., and (e) a glorified Neighbor. Lately,

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since the creation of political parties in literature, it has become the fashion to refer to him as a "Centrist". All of these designations are plausible, all have some justification, and none is a satisfactory measure of the man... ..If I were called upon to add to the categories, I would drop the classicist, the bucolic realist, and the localist, I would call him Revisionist. It is the power not only to restate but to revise ~~too~~ easily accepted statements which is one of his great qualities, and it has been overlooked to a surprising degree."

The presence of Mysticism in the works of Frost is beautifully expressed by a modern German critic:

* "These real masterpieces by Frost achieve an almost mystic undertone; World, God and Man are basically one, and 'Life' itself is the wisdom of this whole."

To return to Frost's own classification of himself as a Synecdochist, the word, of course, comes to us from the Greeks, and it is with the Greek Classicists that Munson catalogues Frost, saying:

† "The purest classical poet of America today is Robert Frost."

"With Frost in the field as a classicist, T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, conspicuous rivals for the title, begin to look like something else.....

"Pound and Eliot are in the main loyal to the principle of authority, whereas Frost depends entirely on personal discovery. Pound and Eliot give allegiance to literary tradition as a governing body, seeking only to produce work that, while molded by tradition, still has sufficient novelty of conception and style to alter somewhat the existing body of letters. Frost is unconcerned with such a theory of dictatorship.....Like the intelligent Greek, he is simply by nature rather positive, critical, and experimental. If he manifests the classical virtues, if he achieves a nature, an imitation of it, a probability and a decorum which can suggest those cultivated by the classical world, it is because he has discovered them in, through, and by his own direct experience."

Another quotation, identifying Frost with the

*Karl Schwarz: Recognition of Robert Frost p.286

† G.B.Munson: Robert Frost p. 100

ancient Greeks , and naming him as our greatest living American poet, is from the pen of Robert Hillyer, himself a poet, and professor of English at Harvard University.

* "Robert Frost sprang into fame as the exponent of northern New England in its own speech. His first volumes were adversely criticised for their colloquial method. A study of Frost, however, soon convinces us that the deliberate ruggedness of his verse has beneath it a carefully modulated music, and that his pictures of the starker aspects of farm life are by no means merely photographic realism, but represent phases in the relation between mankind and nature, and are symbols of man's unrelenting strife. It is significant that the poet himself, although he speaks with his own voice so individually, withdraws himself from the emotional content of his work. When we seek for roots which sustain his poetry, we at first find the obvious one, that of New England; yet there is another going back into English literature through the work of George Crabbe, and there is yet another....which goes straight back to Greek literature. Frost is an excellent Greek scholar, and the philosophers of Athens have molded his thought. I remember that some years ago a student was pleading for the rootless sort of poetry which was in vogue then, and that he cited Robert Frost as an example of a man who had developed through his inborn talent alone without recourse to the past. By good fortune, a professor of Greek who formerly had taught Mr. Frost was present, and summoned us into his study. He produced his old records, opened to Frost's name, and there across the page, recitation after recitation, test after test, was an unbroken series of A grades."

"Good Greek out of New England" is the name Elizabeth Sergeant has given her article on Frost, and she says of his teaching:

† "A kind of professor he has had to be in spite of himself, since most good Greeks-Frost almost admits himself one in "New Hampshire" as well as a plain farmer-from Socrates on have needed to add youth to their stargazing."

Again:

* R. Hillyer: First Principles of Verse pp. 151 & 152

† E. Sergeant: Fire Under the Andes p.286

ancient Greeks, and naming him as our greatest living American poet, is from the pen of Robert Hillyer, himself a poet, and professor of English at Harvard University.

"Robert Frost spent much time as the exponent of northern New England in its own speech. His first volumes were adversely criticized for their colloquial method. A study of Frost, however, soon convinces us that the colloquialism of his verse has beneath it a carefully modulated music, and that his pictures of the darker aspects of farm life are by no means merely photographic realism, but represent ghosts in the relation between man-kind and nature, and are symbols of man's unattainable state. It is significant that the poet himself, although he speaks with his own voice so individually, withers himself from the emotional content of his work. When we seek for roots which sustain his poetry, we at first find the obvious one, that of New England; yet there is another going back into English literature through the work of George Herbert, and there is yet another... which goes straight back to Greek literature. Frost is an excellent Greek scholar, and the philosophers of Athens have molded his thought. I remember that some years ago a student was pleading for the rootless sort of poetry which was in vogue then, and that he cited Robert Frost as an example of a man who had developed through his inherent talent alone without recourse to the poet. By good fortune, a professor of Greek who formerly had taught Mr. Frost was present, and summoned us into his study. He produced his old records, opened to Frost's name, and there across the years, recitation after recitation, test after test, was an unbroken series of A grades."

"Good Greek out of New England" is the name which both Gargant has given her article on Frost, and she says of his teaching:

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Again:

"One of the outstanding facts about Robert Frost is that he and his verse were buried for twenty years in the rocky quietude of New Hampshire. It is not so sure that even now college students-or for that matter college teachers, publishers, editors, critics, and friendly readers-know what to make of the cast of mind and spirit of a good Greek disguised as a Yankee Sage..

"The cast of feature bears out the cast of mind. If I could choose a sculptor from the antique world to mould Frost's head, I should vote for Skopas, who added shadows of human passion to calm Greek faces. In certain moods, this Frost face with its musing eyes, so deeply hollowed and shaded by sharp-drawn brows, seems touched by that pathetic hand. But again the poet's dream grows unified, grave, mystical-religious, and one says, here are a brow and eyes like Dante's. At the dinner in honour of Frost's fiftieth birthday at the Hotel Brevoort, in New York, he wore at first this marble Dantesque mask.....

"Yet it took only a featherweight of affection... to make tenderness flicker like a flame over the still features and shape itself in facial line; only a quip of New England humour to bring a gentle cynic out of hiding. Or shall I say a rustic deity? Eyebrows arch roundly, cheeks draw into shrewd, satiric wrinkles, eyes turn to flashes and darts of blue light, malicious or rejoicing, and as an unruly lock is tossed, one hears the stamp of a hoof-

Pan came out of the woods one day.

His skin and his hair and his eyes were grey.... Frost's skin and his rebellious hair have now a fine harmony of tone, 'the grey of the moss of walls', a young and living greyness that, like a delicate lichen, softens without hiding, the hard and eternal shape of the rock beneath.

-a new-world song, far out of reach.

that is what the rascally Pan of the haunting Yankee pipe came out of the woods to play. Poetry has not flowed in a swelling stream from the pipe of Robert Frost; it has been distilled within him preciousy, like heart's-blood, drop by drop."

A well-nigh perfect description this is of the physical appearance of, and the spirituality suggested by, Robert Frost, the classic poet of our day.

Even when Frost says that he first heard the "voice"

"One of the outstanding facts about Robert Frost is that he and his verse were buried for twenty years in the rocky outskirts of New Hampshire. It is not so much that even now college students or for that matter college teachers, publishers, editors, critics, and friendly readers know what to make of the real of mind and spirit of a good Frost diagnosed as a Yankee poet."

"The best of Frost's poems are out of the east of mind. If I could choose a country from the English world to read Frost's poems, I should vote for Europe, who added shadow of human passion to calm Greek lanes. In certain words, this Frost's with its meaning eyes, so deeply followed and shaded by sharp-brown brows, seems touched by that pathetic hand. But again the poet's brown grows muted, grave, mystical-religious, and one says, here is a brow and eyes like Dante's. At the dinner in honor of Frost's fiftieth birthday at the Hotel Brevoort, in New York, he wore at first this marble Dantean mask. . . . "Yet it took only a flash of light of affection . . . to make tenderness flicker like a flame over the still features and shape itself in facial lines; only a hint of New England humor to bring a gentle cynic out of hiding. Or shall I say a rustic dandy? Eyebrows arch comically, corners draw into wrinkles, nostrils wrinkle, eyes turn to flashes and dots of blue light, malicious or teasing, and an unsmiling look is toward, one hears the stamp of a hoof."

Then came out of the world one day. His skin and his hair and his eyes were grey. . . . Frost's skin and his rebellious hair have now a fine harmony of tone, the grey of the mass of walls, a young and living greyness that, like a delicate lichen, settles within. Molding the hard and eternal shape of the rock beneath. . . . -a new-world sound, far out of reach. That is what the specially low of the haunting Yankee pipe came out of the woods to play. Frosty has not flowed in a swelling stream from the pipe of Robert Frost; it has been distilled within him gradually, like heart's-blood, drop by drop."

A well-known perfect description this is of the physical appearance of and the personality suggested by Robert Frost, the classic poet of our day. . . . Even when Frost says that he first heard the "voice"

"I may be wrong, but Tityrus, to me
The times seem revolutionary bad."

The modern Meliboeus is about to become a shepherd,
but in a way that only Robert Frost could have originated:

"I'm done forever with potato crops
At thirty cents a bushel. Give me sheep.
I know wool's down to seven cents a pound.
But I don't calculate to sell my wool.
I didn't my potatoes. I consumed them.
I'll dress up in sheep's clothing and eat sheep."

There is no parallel to this to quote from Virgil. His
Meliboeus does not choose to calculate.

The modern Tityrus has a quip for the Russians:

"You come to me and I'll unfold to you
A five year plan I call so, not because
It takes ten years or so to carry out,
Rather because it took five years at least
To think it out.....
Build soil. Turn the farm in upon itself
Until it can contain itself no more..."

Tityrus (Frost) will do the same with his thoughts.

"The thought I have, and my first impulse is
To take to market-I will turn it under.
The thought from that thought-I will turn it under.
And so on to the limit of my nature.
We are too much out, and if we won't draw in
We shall be driven in."

Frost is urging his countrymen-for his appeal is
really addressed to Americans all-to achieve what seems
like an impossibility, when he asks that they become intro-
spective; and what IS an impossibility, when he advises a
nation of "joiners":

"Don't join too many gangs. Join few, if any.

"I may be wrong, but Titurus, to me
The times seem revolutionary bad."

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Meliboeus does not choose to calculate.

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nation of "joiners":

"Don't join too many gangs. Join few, if any."

Join the United States and join the family-
But not much in between unless a college."

His advice should be respected, for he has practiced what he preaches. There are a few "literary gangs" he has had to join, but his really active membership has been restricted to the three he lists as worth joining. Upright citizen, model family man, college professor extraordinary: Robert Frost is all of these. Virtue has indeed been One in his life, for he has been a good man, loved by his family, his students, his friends, and his countrymen, as well as a wise poet, appreciated by the world.

Of course there will come a time when this Poet will be with us no more; when "God's last Put out the Light" will be spoken for him as it has already been for his beloved wife. Their marriage was *preserved like treasure through the years". Like treasure, too, has Frost preserved his sturdy character, his high ideals, his God-given talents. Preserved like treasure through the years to come will be his name and fame: the simplicity of his well-spent life and the beauty of his volumes of verse.

Contrary to the laws of nature, may this New England Frost be one that is preserved by the warmth of sons of future dawns. May Robert Frost, "the farmer-poet-teacher of his race", take his rightful place among the Immortals, not only of America, but of the World!

* E.S.Sergeant: Fire Under the Andes p.292

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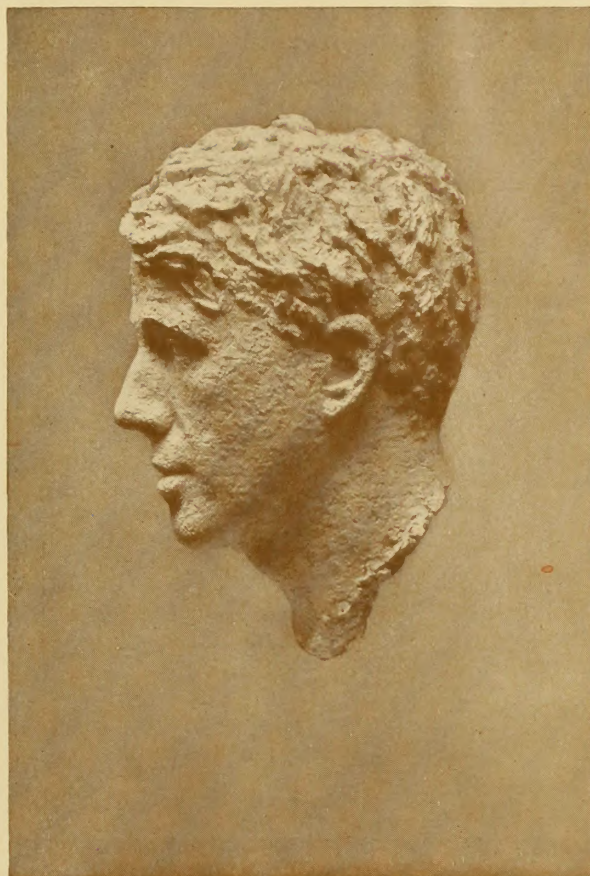
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C O N C L U S I O N



ROBERT FROST

Head of A Future Immortal
in the Hall of Fame

C O N C L U S I O N

* "Let me be the one
To do what is done"

is an assertive couplet from the pen of Robert Frost: and his request has been granted in full measure, if it is assumed that what he has asked to do is to set down for posterity in poetry a perfect picture of New England in Post-Victorian days. Other poets have described their New England-Whittier's "Snowbound" is an excellent example- but but the major portion of their writings have a far wider scope. Frost, on the contrary, has written a few poems of "a further range", but practically all of his poems vivify the New England landscape.

Other New England poets have made music pleasing to the ear because of the lovely language employed, unusual and poetical, but Frost delights with music made from plain, everyday Yankee talk.

Deeds of world valor, folk of universal fame appear in the songs sung by other New England poets, but Frost sings of the daily commonplaces of New England farm life, of ordinary farm folk, in his bucolic verse. And it was among these ordinary farm folk that he chose to live, in the New England hills, instead of his native California or England, where he had won his laurels, when

all of the high places of the world were his to choose.

Other poets who first saw the light of day in New England had ~~an~~ inborn love of Yankee-land; whereas Robert Frost might have applied Veni, Vidi, Vici to his own life when he read Caesar as a young Latin student, for he came with reluctance to New England, saw that it was good, and conquered all his aversions to such an extent that he became the Very Voice and Essence of New England.

Surely this poet who is a descendant of a long line of New England stock; who made it A Boy's Will to love New England; who lived North of Boston almost all of his years from choice; who made the burden of his song the daily lives of New Hampshire folk; who vivified the New England landscape-it might be a Mountain Interval or a West-Running Brook-for posterity; who set down the daily drama of New England farm life in true Yankee fashion, even to the tones of voice; surely this poet is THE New England Poet of poets.

He is more than this, for his sharply-drawn pictures of New England life gain A Further Range by being projected on a screen illuminated by Universal Truth; and for his dramatic offerings Frost is at once the author, the producer, the camera man, and the critic. No matter how long production is held up, no performance is released

until Perfection has been attained.

Frostwork is defined as "delicate figurework formed by frost". The beauty of the Frost-work shown in these pages has been formed in this fashion: this particular New England Frost observes the simple happenings of his commonplace surroundings with all-seeing eyes; stores them in his very brilliant, very complex mind, where he ponders over them until he has seen their relation to the world in general; then, moved by emotions generated in his understanding and sympathetic heart, he sets down the incidents in verse, simple, apparently, as they were at the start; but added to them now, in reality, is an idea as to their place in the eternal scheme of things.

Because his poetry is universal, although written in New England, about New England, by a New England farmer employing New England speech patterns, the author is more than THE New England Poet of Poets. Robert Frost is an Immortal, and his works will go on unto the end of Time, along with those of his dearly-loved Greek and Roman poets, of Shakespeare and Milton, and of the rest of that Divine Company whose genius has elevated their writings to the category of World Classics. Fortunate, indeed, is America of the future, to be able to claim as one of her few World Figures in Literature Robert Frost, Poet and Gentleman.

A P P E N D I X

Frost Out of Season

The Sunday PostThe Independent Democratic
Paper of New England

SUNDAY, JULY 10, 1938

THE POET TEACHER

The resignation of Robert Frost from the faculty of Amherst College is interesting because it is so obviously voluntary and because of the poet's modest admission of his belief in his incapacity for teaching. This is certainly very unusual. One must gather from the manner in which the twice winner of the Pulitzer prize describes himself as a "no-time" teacher that his actual class-room work was probably very limited and that he was more a "personality" than a teacher, technically speaking.

But it may very well be that Mr. Frost underestimates the importance of being a personality among the young students of literature on the campus. This is, to be sure, an intangible value but while it cannot be statistically measured it is nevertheless significant. The presence of Mr. Frost on the Amherst campus attracted respect to the field of current poetry which it otherwise might not have.

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Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Mark Van Doren,
W. H. Auden, C. Day Lewis, James Stephens,
William Dean Howells, Christopher Morley,
Padraic Colum, Ludwig Lewisohn, Edwin Muir,
and others.

The book is invaluable as it contains the
"cream" of almost every article published
concerning Robert Frost. The writer had
already looked up several of these articles
in their original form, before this book
was published, and knows, therefore, the
excellence of the material chosen.

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Correspondence

Mrs. Harriette Melvin Tibbets, a former
Pupil of Frost's at Pinkerton Academy

Dr. Burnham, a former friend of Frost's
in the early Lawrence days

Mrs. Robert Holdsworth of Amherst, a
former neighbor

Mrs. Inez Perkins Adams of Plymouth, N.H.

Personal Visits

Miss Sylvia Clarke of Derry Village, N.H.,
formerly a teacher at Pinkerton Academy
with Frost.

Mrs. Harriette Tibbets, former pupil at
Pinkerton

Miss Ida Fowler of Beverly, a former pupil
at Pinkerton

Illustrations

Photograph of Frost kindly given by
Mr. Joseph Strong of the Boston Post

Dance order used at a Lawrence High
School dance in 1895 loaned for a copy
of the picture of the old high school

Book jackets of the kind used for Frost's
works sent by Henry Holt and Company
on request

Pictures of Pinkerton kindly donated
by Harriette M. Tibbets

Hitherto Unpublished Verse

Miss Sylvia Clarke

Mrs. Harriette M. Tibbets

Newspaper Items

Donated by the instructor and fellow-
members of the Seminar in which this
thesis was written.

Illustrations

Photograph of group kindly given by
Mr. Joseph Brown of the Boston Board

Images order used at a distance of 100
feet from the ground in 1885 taken for a copy
of the report of the first school

First photograph of the kind used for
work sent by Henry Holt and Company
on request

Photograph of children kindly donated
by Mrs. J. H. Brown

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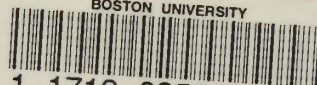
Miss Lavinia Clark

Mrs. J. H. Brown

Younger class

Number of the illustration and follow-
ing of the figures in which this
figure was written

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